

Disney Junior makes big strides at US retail **p30**

New app *ShowMobile* intros the "Instasode" **p41**

Licensing Show—Why co-branding may be the future of entertainment licensing **p44**



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MAY/JUNE 2014



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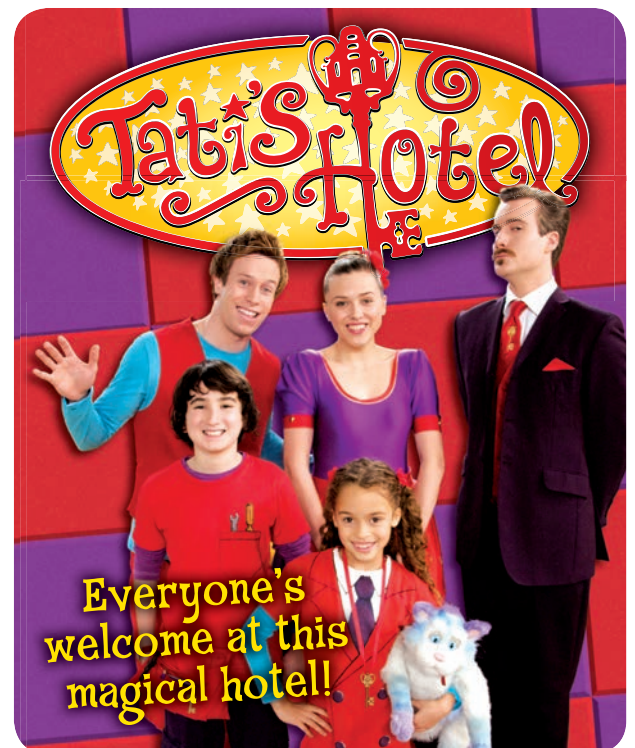
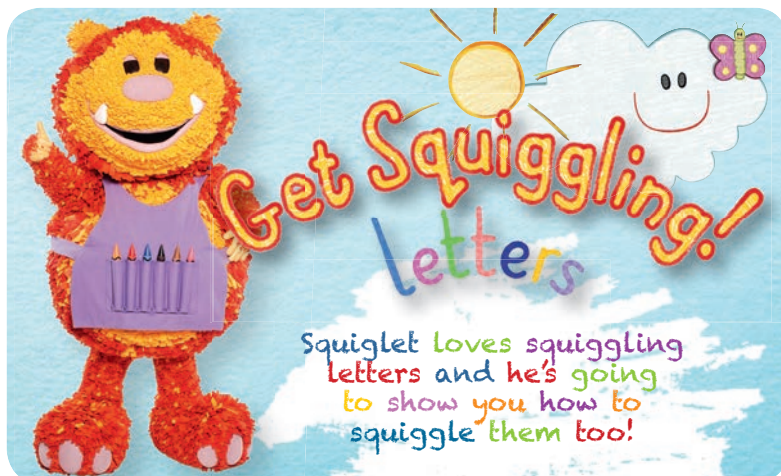
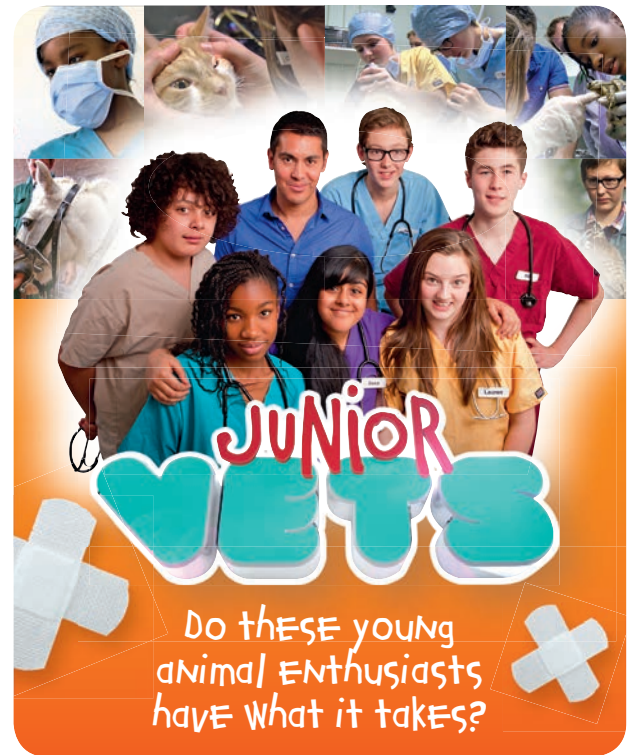
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With US\$1.8 billion
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Disney Junior is
reaching its CP stride

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Kidscreen and the China Animation Association have partnered to co-produce a brand-new B2B event designed to bring kids entertainment executives from the East and West together for three days of professional networking and collaborative learning.

These leading companies will all be there...



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(Mattel)



Maura Regan
(Sesame Workshop)



Josh Selig
(Little Airplane Productions)



Irene Weibel
(Nelvana)



Zhijun Cai
(CCTV Animation)

Nickelodeon's Jules Borkent to deliver the opening keynote

Join world-leading broadcaster Jules Borkent, SVP of Programming and Acquisitions for Nickelodeon, as he kicks off Kidscreen East with an inside look at the global kidnet's multiplatform strategy.



Kidscreen East will feature the most popular sessions from Kidscreen's signature event—Kidscreen Summit—but with a regional focus and an emphasis of building new business relationships and stimulating trade and dialogue.



nickelodeon



Joe Aguilar
(Oriental DreamWorks)

Shouldn't you be there, too?



Sean Chu
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Licensing Show

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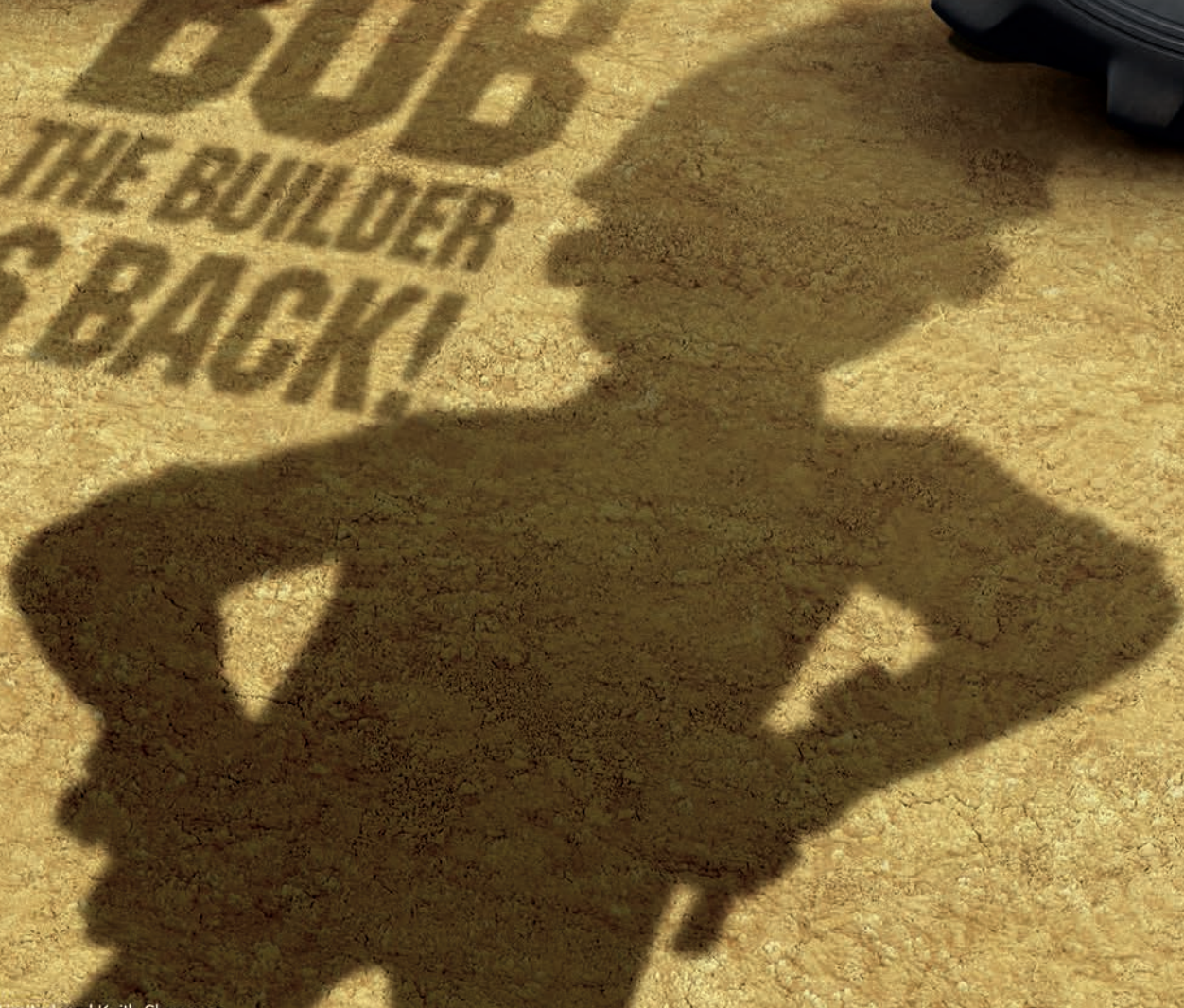
Character corral—Licensing Show is the key event in keeping up with the biz—we've profiled some IPs to watch in Vegas **p54**



Cover Our cover features an ad for preschool brand and channel Sprout's merchandising program, represented by Big Tent Entertainment, while our inside editorial cover sports a cast of characters from Disney Junior's key properties.



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Strength in numbers

My six-year-old twin nephews (also known as my own personal focus group), fell in love with Lego Batman when they were four years old. When their parents deemed them old enough, the boys got to watch *Batman Forever*. As the 1995 live-action flick rolled, Gavin and Owen promptly screeched “That is not the real Two Face?!” the moment Tommy Lee Jones appeared on-screen. You see, Jones looked nothing like the character as rendered in their beloved *Lego Batman* videogame.



The twins were so upset with this apparent falsehood that they made their mother turn off the TV—they fell in love with Batman as depicted within the context of Lego and no other version would do. What they hopefully cannot articulate at their age, is that they fell under the spell of well-executed co-branding. It's worth noting that they discovered Batman through a non-traditional medium and may not have come to appreciate the superhero—at all—were it not for the Lego co-branded video-

game. And as Senior Writer Gary Rusak details in this issue's “Cracking co-branding” (p.44), Lego's savvy embrace of licensed properties within its very distinct style and brand helped turn it into the most profitable toyco in the world. Additionally, the company's most ambitious co-mingling yet, *The Lego Movie*, made US\$461 million at the box office and re-affirmed Lego Batman as a star for Warner Bros. (Batman's licensor and one of the film's co-producers). Moreover, Gary's story illustrates why we're going to see more mash-ups in the entertainment licensing universe. It seems risk-averse retailers have cottoned on to the idea that two (or more) are better than one when it comes to generating sales.

The world's largest entertainment licensor Disney Consumer Products is well-aware of the power of co-branding, learning key lessons about its application through the creation of the Disney Princess umbrella brand. Currently worth in excess of US\$3 billion at global retail, the roughly 15-year-old brand has princesses from other Disney properties co-existing on products and on-screen, and preschool girls never seem to tire of this magical made-up world. So it's not surprising that DCP has taken that route with its newest hit brand, Disney Junior, driven by the preschool-targeted network and Disney Channel block of the same name. In roughly 15 months, the IPs under the Disney Junior umbrella (Mickey & Friends, Sofia the First, Doc Mc Stuffins and Jake and the Never Land Pirates) have propelled consumer products sales in excess of US\$1.8 billion annually at retail. With the addition of space-themed series *Miles from Tomorrowland* in 2015 (see “Next stop, Tomorrowland,” p. 30) you can expect that figure to further broach the stratosphere.

Speaking of **Gary**, after eight years with the magazine, he's decided to leave *Kidscreen*. I want to express my appreciation for his considered and thorough coverage of the consumer products biz over the years. We'll miss him. But that means at Licensing Show, be on the lookout for our new Senior Writer, **Aaron Hutchins**, who comes to us from Canada's most-respected news magazine *Maclean's*. He'll be stepping into the world of licensing, and I hope you'll show him just how much fun it is.

Cheers,
Lana

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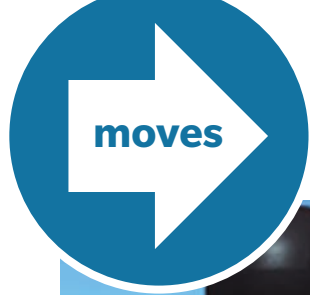
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The List

Five things on our radar this month

1 Disney's retail domination

The newest research from The NPD Group reveals that US licensed toy sales grew 3% in 2013 and currently represent nearly 30% of total brick-and-mortar toy dollar sales. So good news for the licensing biz, right? Maybe not for everyone in the industry. The stats also point to Disney's overarching presence at mass-market retailers, thanks in part to its ownership of boys action heavies Marvel and Star Wars (Lucasfilm). For the first quarter of 2014, Disney's Frozen, Disney Princess, Mickey & Friends and Star Wars ranked as four of the five bestselling toy licenses. And the top-five toy licenses over the last 15 months (in alpha order) were: Cars The Movie, Disney Princess, Mickey & Friends, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Nickelodeon) and Star Wars. We don't need to do the math for you. Any licensor working in the US will tell you that Disney's dominance may just be leaving less room at mass-market retail for everyone else.



2 Back to basics

With an operating loss of nearly US\$1 billion in its first year, Target Canada sacked its president Tony Fisher in May. In efforts to turn around the struggling Canuck division, new US prez Mark Schindele is embarking on a 30-day operations assessment. But considering Target's additional leadership overhaul stateside in the wake of a massive data breach, and an ISS recommendation for shareholders to oust its board, the number-two US mass-market retailer isn't exactly on solid ground.



3 DreamWorks' balancing act

Disappointing box office results for DreamWorks Animation's *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* contributed to a US\$25.4-million Q1 revenue decline for the company's already inconsistent feature film segment. DWA has high hopes for this summer's *How To Train Your Dragon 2* and *The Penguins of Madagascar*, bowing this Thanksgiving. But its TV operation, which is growing in profitability, is getting even more attention. Watch out for DWA's all-new YouTube family channel that's on the way.




4 Game for China

China ended its decade-long ban on foreign videogame consoles in September, so Chinese gamers stuck with Playstation 2s may soon get an upgrade. Last month, Sony reportedly signed a deal with state-run Shanghai Oriental Pearl Group to make and sell consoles and games. Microsoft has also announced its plans to sell the Xbox One in the country. Perhaps there's life in the shrinking console industry yet?



5 Netflix's next notch

After solidifying its stance as the top SVOD provider in the US with more than 34 million subscribers, Netflix, which is in more than 40 countries, will finally expand across Europe later this year into Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and France. There's no doubt the global appetite for Hollywood-produced content is growing, but are these new countries equally hungry for Netflix? The future of the SVOD giant depends on it.

 To keep up with the news as it happens, check out Kidscreen.com daily.



After spending nearly a decade in the licensing biz holding down successful executive gigs, **Rob Corney** stepped out on his own with Bulldog Licensing seven years ago, and hasn't looked back since

Staying on-brand in a diverse industry

The gig Founder and MD of London-based Bulldog Licensing, working with licensors, licensees and retailers to maximize the global potential of brands that include Garfield, Plants vs. Zombies, Wolfblood and Cindy.

Early days As a toy-loving child growing up in Manchester, England, Corney couldn't get enough of popular brands like Star Wars, Lego and Domino Rally. "My friend Paul and I would set up thousands of dominoes around my parent's dining room. The cat was banned from the house," he says. But one brand that sparked young Corney's interest in particular was Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, or The Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles, as they were called in the UK at the time. "The word ninja was too aggressive for British broadcast," explains Corney, who had no idea that he would get to work directly with the IP years later when former employer 4Kids oversaw the brand's reboot in 2003. Eventually putting toys on hold for rugby, water polo, high school journalism (he once interviewed former Brit PM Tony Blair) and an English Lit degree, Corney embarked on his next adventure. He landed a spot as a graduate management trainee at Carlton Television, a position he earned as a result of some screenwriting experience, and one that would plant the seeds for his eventual career in licensing.

A perfect fit Despite screenwriting aspirations and pressure from Carlton to try TV sales, Corney's time as a trainee opened his eyes to a much bigger world in the entertainment industry. He quickly identified licensing as the ideal career for him. "Licensing is about so much more than sales. It encompasses brand management, marketing, development and identifying retail channels. It really appealed to my sensibilities of wanting to look at a broader picture of something," he says. With his mind made up, Corney moved up the ranks to become Carlton's licensing manager, a role he kept until moving on to 4Kids in 2004 as its director of UK licensing. Looking back, he singles out Carlton's former director of strategy, Nick Markham, as being hugely influential on his life.

"The company was a big, dynamic corporation and he was on the board of directors at Carlton TV at a really young age, but was always happy to go for a pint and talk about careers. To get that level of access was incredible," recalls Corney.

Loyalty and trust With his feet set firmly in the licensing world, Corney made the biggest move of his life in 2007 when he left 4Kids to launch his own company, Bulldog Licensing. He credits advice from his dad, a World War 2 navy vet, for helping him get through the transition. "He always said, 'There's no such thing as a bad decision. You make a decision based on the information you have in-hand at the time. When you make that first decision, you have to trust your own judgment.'"

Having made the right call, Corney says licensing provides learning experiences daily. "It's an industry that throws curve balls at you every day because you deal across multiple categories and brands. I've licensed everything from cars to beer in my career. You have to be on your toes all the time," he says. And one of the most important things he's learned in his career came after independent TV company Granada merged with Carlton in 2002. "Very few members of Carlton survived that, but the ones who did saw it as an opportunity."

The future These days, Corney's priority is to grow Bulldog's new US office, which opened shop last summer, as well as expand its European business. He's also super-excited that his two young children are now into Lego and Spider-Man. "If you can't have fun in licensing, there is something wrong with you." Never truer words were spoken. —Jeremy Dickson



Bulldog has helped gaming brand Plants vs. Zombies delve deeper into retail

Out of Office

Tales from the frequent fliers club



Nina Hahn

SVP of international production and development, Nickelodeon

1. In my carry-on
My go-to gadget

2. My go-to gadget
An automatic cherry pitter



Photo: iStockphoto

3. On the fly
Dream, plan and pray that the person sitting next to me doesn't snore



Photo: iStockphoto

4. Preferred in-air tunes
In-air "toons"—
SpongeBob SquarePants, of course!



Photo: Nickelodeon

5. Best in-flight food
That's an oxymoron, no?

6. Best power-lunch
Sushi with Jacques Cousteau



Photo: iStockphoto

7. Window or aisle?
Both, one seat for me and one for my cherry pitter

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Calling the shots with Leo Howard

Teen star of Disney Channel's *Kickin' It* gets behind the camera to become the youngest person ever to direct a TV episode

When Leo Howard got a unique opportunity in February to step outside of his regular acting role as Jack on Disney XD's *Kickin' It* and direct an episode of the series, the 16-year-old martial artist had no idea he would become a Guinness Book of World Records holder as the youngest director of a TV episode. But that's exactly what's happened. Howard makes his directorial debut on *Kickin' It* ep "Fight at the Museum," which will premiere on Disney XD on June 30. Howard took some time to chat with Kidscreen about his experience as a first-time director.

How did the directing opportunity come about?

I've always been really interested in directing, so around the middle of season one and two, I decided I would start paying attention to what happens behind the scenes because who knows what kind of opportunities are going to come about in the future for my career. I started shadowing all of our directors and I did it enough to get people's attention. I eventually just asked if it would be OK if I directed, and they were super-gracious in giving me the opportunity.

How was the experience?

It totally exceeded my expectation of how fun it would be. I love being able to take something that is someone else's vision, or my own vision, and twist it into how I see it, which is part of a director's job. Bringing something to life, choosing shots and designing scenes through directing is something I want to continue throughout my career.

How did you prepare?

One of the director's main jobs is to build the shot list or prepare camera blocking where we design what the audience is going to see. For the previous eight or nine episodes before mine, I blocked each one along with the director, and we would compare notes—I picked it up pretty quickly.

How does it feel to be in the Guinness Book of World Records?

It's pretty amazing. [The record] has nothing to do with why I did it, but it just so happened that we set one in the process, which was pretty cool.

What was the biggest challenge you faced as a director?

The one thing I was expecting to be problem, in fact, wasn't. I thought people who have been doing this for 40 years would kind of look down on me and not actually listen to me, because I am pretty young. But everyone ended up treating me how they would treat any other director. That's all I could have asked for. I didn't want anyone to sugarcoat anything.

What's harder: learning a new stunt, acting or directing?

They're all very different. Stunts come naturally to me because I've been doing them since I was four. I would say directing is the hardest. With stunts, you can do takes and takes. But with directing, you kind of only get one shot at it.

If you could direct anyone, who would it be?

One of my all-time favorite actors is Johnny Depp. I would almost want to direct him just so that I could learn some acting skills from him in the process, because I still want to act, as well. —Jeremy Dickson

On the circuit

Notes for the industry travel diary

July 22-24

Kidscreen East
Qingdao, China

kidscreeneast.com



Kidscreen East is a new event designed to bring kids entertainment executives from the East and West together for three days of professional networking and collaborative learning. The sibling to Kidscreen Summit in New York, Kidscreen East will offer access to more than 45 keynotes, panel discussions, lectures and networking sessions designed to help expand business both in Asia and beyond.

PITCH IT! COMES TO KIDSCREEN EAST:

Kidscreen is bringing its popular live pitch competition to Kidscreen East, and will showcase three Asian preschool projects in development. We are accepting project submissions from Asian producers and creators at kidscreeneast.com/2014/pitch until Friday, June 27.

June 24-27

Comic-Con International
San Diego, California

www.comic-con.org/ccj



The largest comic book and popular arts convention in North America makes its return for four days this July. A Mecca for science fiction and fantasy, the event is considered to be just as important for fanboys as it is for Hollywood studios looking to market the blockbuster du jour.

September 23-26

Cartoon Forum
Toulouse, France

www.cartoon-media.eu



Taking place in Toulouse, France, this annual co-production forum for animated TV series is expected to draw more than 800 participants from 32 countries, including 250 buyers. The forum provides European producers with the opportunity to pitch animated projects to decision-makers, buyers and investors, and 68 projects will be pitched this September. Of course, also up for viewing is the gorgeous scenery of southwestern France.

▶ A full listing of Industry Events is available at kidscreen.com/events

Blasting off

Costa Rica's Rocket Cartoons takes its family-run business to new heights

Who Thanks to its fast-growing client list that includes the likes of Disney and Nick, and new growth in original content creation, San Jose, Costa Rica-based animation studio Rocket Cartoons is proving there's more to the small Central American country than ecotourism and coffee. Formed in 2008 by digital animation professional Leo Trinidad, Rocket started out as a provider of Flash animation services and has since become the country's main production house. It boasts a wide range of original animation, including Costa Rica's first animated IP *Ivick Von Salza*, short-form preschool series *Yum Yum and You*, co-production *Outopus*, and its latest project, the six x 11-minute comedy *Kelvin Magnetic—The Volta Kid*. As it grows, Rocket's 2D productions are continuing to attract international attention. Broadcasters signing on to 52 x two-minute slapstick series *Outopus*, through Rocket's Irish distribution partner Monster Entertainment, include Disney (Japan), YLE (Finland) and Al Jazeera Children's Channel (Middle East).

Gaining recognition Despite its track record, Rocket CEO and president Trinidad says it hasn't been an easy road. "Our country doesn't have a strong animation or IP production industry, so we've made it our main goal to grow the industry by simply doing what we know best—creating great properties," says Trinidad. "It has been very difficult to get financing, but we are working hard to expand our catalogue and increase our credibility in the industry based on the abilities and talent at Rocket, and in Costa Rica, in general." He adds that being a small, tight-knit family has also helped buoy the company through tough circumstances.

Rocket's core executive staff currently includes Trinidad's wife Viviana Flores (production coordinator), brother Daniel Rojas (animation director) and mother Eugenia Céspedes (director of LATAM business affairs). And while creative director and partner Bryan López does not share his DNA, Trinidad says he is like a brother. "We are a core family of talented artists and creators who have always loved animation and are immersed in every part of the company," he says.

With little government funding, much of Rocket's growth has come from its ability to find the right partners. French distributor Awol Animation has helped expand the broadcasting reach of *Yum Yum and You*, and a recent deal with Empire Multimedia will see L&M growth for the IP in Asia. Additional Rocket partners include *Outopus* co-producer Studio Flex and Costa Rica's Happy Dog Games, which launched an app based on *Ivick Von Salza*.

Next up While Rocket's long-term plans include increasing its service work, creating more original properties, and boosting its L&M activity, its immediate focus is on new series *Kelvin Magnetic—The Volta Kid*. With delivery expected for 2015, Monster Entertainment is currently shopping for presales, and a new deal has just been inked with Frederator Studios to offer exclusive *Volta Kid* shorts on YouTube in support of the upcoming series' launch.

—Jeremy Dickson



Frederator Studios will help launch YouTube shorts based on Rocket's *Kelvin Magnetic—The Volta Kid*

Know your audience

By Jim Benton



©jimbenton.com

The world's largest toy company is thinking big in terms of global strategy. Mattel has created a new streamlined marketing and creative division that will span the company's global portfolio of consumer brands, headed by former Barbie GM **Richard Dickson**. The company also has a new EVP of international in **Tim Kilpin**. As chief brands officer of the new marketing division, Dickson oversees worldwide brand strategy across the company's portfolio of brands including Barbie, Hot Wheels, Fisher-Price and Thomas & Friends. He also heads all aspects of marketing strategy, creative execution, product

intention is to grow this number over the next few years. Most recently, Kilpin served as EVP of Mattel's Global Brands Team—Boys & Girls, a role to which he was appointed in 2011. Prior to that, he served as GM and SVP of Mattel Brands.

In other consumer products news, Former HIT Entertainment exec **Stacey Reiner** has launched her own licensing and branding agency, New York-based Remarkable Brands, hitting the ground running with two new properties, Lovi & Dovi and UndieBabies from California-based Inoochi. Remarkable

and internationally. Skala is MD of his own company, Skala Consultancy, which specializes in content strategy, funding and development for digital and production companies and broadcasters. He was formerly SVP of programming & TV Sales for Guinness World Records, and SVP of programming & productions for HIT Entertainment.

Also in the UK, international distributor Zodiak Rights has hired **Gary Woolf [A]** for the newly created position of head of digital, business development and insight. Woolf was most recently SVP of digital and business

former Disney exec **Humphrey Black [B]** to the newly created role of VP of media distribution for EMEA, where he will lead distribution relationships and negotiations with broadcasters, cable operators and wireless and interactive services providers. Based out of London, Black will be charged with developing the content distribution strategy to maximize the revenue and operating income across all lines of business across the EMEA region. Black was most recently Disney's director of channel distribution, EMEA. He led the licensing of Disney's channels and branded VOD services. He

to publishers, networks and film studios. She has also served as the VP of original movies for Disney Channel and SVP of creative development and US sales at Cookie Jar Entertainment. Rainmaker, for its part, launched a TV production division under the Mainframe banner late last year.

And as Netflix continues to bolster its kids content library, the SVOD giant has named game designer and No Crusts Interactive founder **Carla Engelbrecht Fisher [D]** as its new director of product innovation for kids & family. Relocating from New York to San Francisco, Fisher

people



development and content creation across Mattel's legacy and new brands. Dickson brings with him more than two decades of strategic business and creative marketing expertise, having most recently served as president and CEO of branded businesses at The Jones Group. Before that, Dickson served as GM & SVP for Barbie at Mattel, overseeing the brand's revitalization and expansion into a variety of new categories. Kilpin, meanwhile, will look to strengthen Mattel's presence outside of the US in emerging markets throughout Asia, Europe and Latin America. Global sales currently make up roughly half of Mattel's total annual revenue, and company CEO Bryan Stockton says the

Brands will work closely with its clients to help develop corporate and branding strategies, consumer products campaigns and licensing partnerships. Reiner spent the past six years at HIT as director of new business development, where she worked with Thomas & Friends, Barney and Bob the Builder.

Another HIT alum has likely ordered new business cards. UK-based Horrid Henry producer Novel Entertainment is expanding its offerings in the digital space, and in doing so has tapped **Christopher Skala** as a consultant. Skala will work closely with the Novel team to explore opportunities across digital media for its key brands both in the UK

development at UK-based distributor All3Media International, and prior to that, he was VP of business development and digital for BBC Worldwide. Woolf will be tasked with creating the company's digital growth strategy as well as identifying non-traditional revenue streams for top Zodiak Rights franchises and heading up the newly created insight team. Zodiak Rights is the global distribution and rights exploitation arm of Zodiak Media, which has seen several execs exit in recent months throughout its various divisions, including Zodiak UK Kids CEO **Nigel Pickard**, who stepped down from his role at the end of April.

Meanwhile, Turner Broadcasting has named

has also held roles at Virgin Media and Spectrum Strategy Consultants.

Also taking on a VP role is **Fonda Snyder [C]**, who has been appointed to the newly created role of VP of creative development and sales at Vancouver, Canada-based animation studio Rainmaker Entertainment. Snyder now oversees the company's creative development projects, co-productions, acquisitions and production service opportunities. Prior to joining Rainmaker, Snyder was a creative consultant at Technicolor and also led her own management company, Alchemy Ink, which represented authors and illustrators looking to sell their work

will act as the product lead for all Netflix kids & family-targeted viewer experiences across all devices. Fisher, who will continue to contribute to her *Kids Got Game* blog on Kidscreen.com, is well-versed in the area of creating educational and developmentally appropriate interactive experiences for kids. Having spent nearly 15 years making children's digital goods, she has designed, produced, researched and consulted on a wide variety of commercial and educational products, from web to mobile to gaming consoles. Prior to starting No Crusts Interactive, she worked for Sesame Workshop, PBS KIDS and Highlights for Children.

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Within its emotional-intelligence curriculum, Nick's new preschool series *Shimmer and Shine* teaches kids that it's okay to make mistakes

With a 2014/15 programming slate offering more educational and interactive preschool content than ever before, Nickelodeon is taking curriculum integration to a new level

BY JEREMY DICKSON

Smart TV

In the highly competitive preschool space, where global demand for cross-platform content that entertains and educates continues to grow, kidcasters are increasingly looking at new concepts that best reflect the changing needs of today's early learners and their parents.

For Nickelodeon, which has maintained a legacy of delivering high-quality preschool shows (*Blue's Clues*, *Dora the Explorer*) driven by engaging characters, stories and interactivity, its 2014/15 season is notably significant.

It marks Nick's biggest ever in terms new content production across multiple platforms, demos and genres. And the kidsnet is zeroing in on its youngest viewers with particular vigor. Stateside, more than 100 episode premieres are lined

up for the channel's preschool block, from a bevy of brand-new animated series including *Wallykazam!*, *Dora* spin-off *Dora and Friends: Into the City!*, *Blaze and the Monster Machines*, *Shimmer & Shine* and *Fresh Beat Band of Spies*. (Also on-deck are a whack of new eps from current preschool series such as *PAW Patrol*, *Bubble Guppies*, *Dora the Explorer*, *Peter Rabbit* and *Team Umizoomi*.)

"Two years ago we made a decision to increase our pipeline by developing and producing more content than ever before, and now we are seeing the fruits of our labor," says Teri Weiss, EVP of production and development for Nickelodeon Preschool. "With every market, there is more content and stronger worldwide competition than ever, especially in the preschool space. So it's crucial that we cut through the clutter and remain best-in-show for kids content."

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Playful learning

A big reason for Nickelodeon's success with preschoolers is its ongoing commitment to research and curriculum diversification. Among its new shows, *Wallykazam!* is Nick's first literacy-themed series. *Blaze and the Monster Machines* is billed as the first preschool show dedicated to all aspects of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). *Dora and Friends: Into the City!*, meanwhile, examines social-emotional skills like community service and peer relationships. *Shimmer & Shine* stresses learning from mistakes in its emotional-intelligence curriculum, while *Fresh Beat Band of Spies* teaches problem-solving.

"What we bring is the strength of our characters and storytelling, combined with a really unique way to approach the curriculum of each show, and integrate it in a way that feels very organic. This is our domestic and global challenge," says Weiss.

She points to *Wallykazam!* and *Blaze and the Monster Machines* as great examples of how Nick is integrating curriculum in new ways. For both series, in fact, Nickelodeon took its usual storybook episode-testing and curriculum consultations a step further.

Dora's latest adventure

Nick's preschool stalwart enters the uncharted territory of tweendom

In 2009, Nickelodeon and Mattel endured a short-lived controversy after they unveiled the first-ever tween version of beloved preschool animated character Dora the Explorer.

Launched as a Nick special entitled *Dora's Explorer Girls* to accompany a doll line, the new Dora aged-up from seven to 10 years old, lived in the city with real kid friends, had longer hair, and wore a tunic with leggings, ballet flats and (gasp!) jewelry.

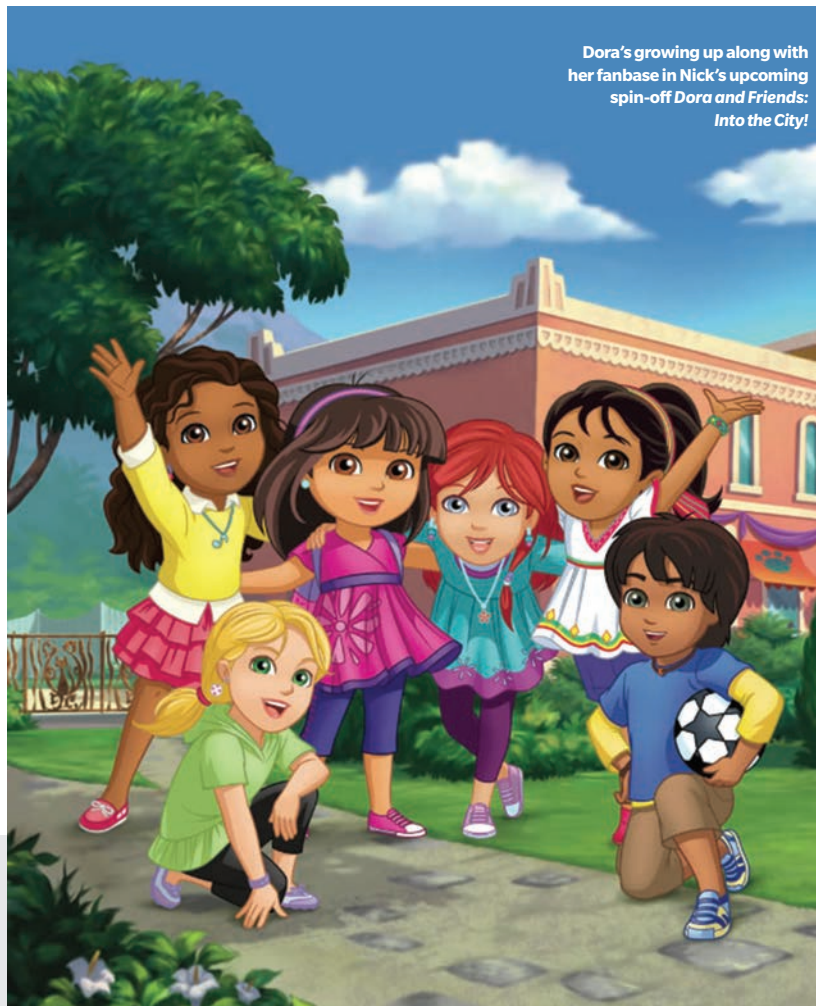
Despite cries from parents that Dora had become too mature, the special was a hit with kids. So Nick greenlit the spin-off series *Dora and Friends: Into the City!*, created by the original minds behind *Dora the Explorer*, Chris Gifford and Valerie Walsh Valdes.

Set to debut this summer, the brand-new 20 x 22-minute ep series is set in a fictional pan-Latino city where 10-year-old Dora is the center of a peer group that works together to give back to the community.

Along with its new setting and characters, the series boasts a first-time interactive curriculum (Dora herself is now into smartphones and apps), more original music than before, and an even greater emphasis on language education.

"We are doing Spanish phrases for the first time," says Walsh Valdes. "It's the hope of our consultants that kids will use these phrases in everyday life. We're working them into the music, too."

According to Gifford, the biggest challenge around the new project was figuring out how the story would be different from the original series. "*Dora the Explorer* was very clearly plotted out in terms of structure, and we did



Dora's growing up along with her fanbase in Nick's upcoming spin-off *Dora and Friends: Into the City!*

away with those things to tell a more surprising story where anything can happen," Gifford says. "We now have other characters, including boys who need their own stories, personalities and maturation plots. It's a more complex narrative we're trying to tell, but one that will also appeal to preschoolers as much as ever."

Walsh Valdes notes that Dora's age has never been a determining factor when it comes to the demo of her audience. "We heard from Nick's research team that the only thing three- to five-year-olds notice that is different with the new Dora is her longer hair. We also know that preschoolers think seven-year-old Dora is their age. Kids identify with her so much, the age doesn't make a difference," she says.

According to Gifford, *Dora and Friends* is already testing incredibly well, even in rough black-and-white animatics, and he wouldn't be surprised if TV audiences continue their love affair with the character for years to come. "We know Dora will be around 15 years from now, but whether we'll be working on it is another story," he says.

When asked if Dora's popular cousin Diego will one day get another spin-off show (*Go, Diego, Go!* ran for five seasons between 2005 and 2011), Gifford says there are no plans, but he and Walsh Valdes would love to do it. "I don't think we'd move him out of the rainforest. Keeping him there as an older kid would be interesting. Val and I did bat an idea back-and-forth last year about Dora going to visit Diego for some animal training help, but we never wrote it. Maybe we'll write it this year." -Jeremy Dickson

Steven Universe



SEE STYLE.



Feedback from preschool and kindergarten teachers helped ensure the literacy curriculum for Nick's *Wallykazam!* stayed on point

"In addition to educational consultants, we started to integrate preschool and kindergarten teachers into our collective group for feedback, which was tremendously helpful. They could really identify what kids are struggling with and the things they are interested in/responding to," says Weiss.

To ensure STEM concepts in *Blaze* would resonate with its youngest audience, for example, Weiss says Nick paid special attention to visual and musical cues. "When you talk about force, adhesion and inertia, they can be very heady concepts. But because we have the ability to demonstrate them visually by showing vehicle impact, or the way car suspension works, it helps get the difficult concepts across more easily," she says. The use of catchy songs is also a good method to help kids define scientific terms, she adds. "If kids can recite the songs in their heads, the science will stick. Repeat viewing is really important, too."

Building momentum

So far, Nick's 2014/15 programming strategy for preschool is paying off. As of April, its preschool block's year-to-date average sat at 4.9 for kids ages two to five on US television—an 11% increase versus the same period a year ago, according to Nielsen ratings.

PAW Patrol and *Wallykazam!* also filled the number-one and two spots, respectfully, as the top-rated preschool shows for kids ages two to five on all US cable TV for the same period.

As new shows continue to roll out (*Dora and Friends* in late summer, *Blaze* this fall, *Shimmer & Shine* and *Fresh Beat Band of Spies* in 2015), Weiss says the future is bright for Nick's preschool production, noting the importance of cultivating talent internally and identifying new talent outside the network through its Nick Jr. animated shorts program.

"Our success rate for developing preschool series out of our shorts program has been terrific, and we'll soon be able to showcase shorts on the *Nick Jr. App*, giving us another great opportunity to expose talent," says Weiss.

The *Nick Jr. App*, originally slated to launch in the US this spring, is now expected to debut this fall, according to Nickelodeon's SVP of digital Matthew Evans. "It gives us a better opportunity to launch with our upcoming new shows like *Dora and Friends*," he says. "And it gives us extra time to ensure we will have double the amount of interactive activities and more original content. It will ultimately be a stronger experience for our audience and better reinforce our focus on curriculum." 

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Roku to expand kids vertical

US digital media maker sees big potential to offer more kids and family channels on its hit platform



After entering the digital media player manufacturing business in 2002, Saratoga, California-based Roku made tech history in 2008 when it successfully launched the first set-top device to stream Netflix to the TV.

Now with more than eight million of these streaming devices sold in the US, and healthy growth in Canada and the UK, the company is looking to expand its burgeoning channel library—especially within the kids and family category.

Roku currently offers 54 kids and family channel apps including Nat Geo Kids, PBS Kids, BabyFirst, Angry Birds Toons and Disney Channel within its overall portfolio of more than 1,500 authenticated channels. The company is now banking on its open-platform concept, ease of use, simple set-up, variety of content (movies, TV shows, music, casual games), speed of delivery and marketing know-how to attract new kids content partners.

“Being able to provide a wide variety of brands is key because it is an open platform,” says Roku’s director of content acquisition, Ziba Kaboli-Gerbrands.

“Top brands like Disney, Nat Geo and PBS do really well, but we also have a lot of smaller partners that, for example, have done really well on YouTube. Giving consumers choice has made us a top seller.”

Why kids? As the digital media landscape for kids shifts deeper into streaming and mobile device use, Kaboli-Gerbrands says producers are looking for more meaningful relationships with their audiences.

“Across all genres we have a lot of partners who are trying to create channels and take back the shows they produce that would traditionally be licensed out to linear channels. Developing their own brands allows for a more direct relationship with the audience,” she says. Roku also helps companies produce their own channel apps by providing a free software development kit, access to third-party developers, a fast two- to three-month delivery period, in-app billing for subscription-based channels, as well as on-device and off-device promotional capabilities.

“Our banner ad space on Roku’s main user interface commands close to 150 million impressions per month,” she says. “We also put our partners on a feature channel and promote them across social media. Depending on the deal, our marketing services will either be included or for purchase.”

Promo expansions in the future will include video ads and cross-channel video inventory availability.

“Because we take a standard revenue share of 30% from our partners, we are incentivized to promote the channels because their success is ours,” contends Kaboli-Gerbrands.

Criteria While Roku provides a variety of services, it requires producers to be prepared with a well-designed app (if done in-house), a good amount of featured content that can be refreshed quite often, and promotions of some kind.

“We look at quality of content, what kind of audience has been amassed on other platforms, and specific, buzz-worthy shows within channels that can move the needle,” says Kaboli-Gerbrands.

What’s next While Roku doesn’t currently have a dedicated kids team, the company is in the process of hiring a new manager.

“We have a lot of deals in the pipeline. Even just a year ago we didn’t have the breadth of kids content we have now,” says Kaboli-Gerbrands, noting that Roku had recent discussions with Canadian content producers DHX Media and Breakthrough Entertainment.

She says the company has no immediate plans to create original content à la Netflix and Amazon, but its next big initiative will be the launch of Roku TV over the upcoming holiday period.

Announced at CES, Roku is partnering with Chinese manufacturers Hisense and TCL on six HDTV models with built-in streaming capabilities.

“Because adoption rates on smart TVs are really high, our goal is to have Roku become the operating system for TVs,” says Kaboli-Gerbrands. “Although our devices are still our bread and butter.” —Jeremy Dickson

Roku currently boasts 54 kids and family channels on its open-platform concept



Striking a chord

Germany's first-ever free-to-air Disney Channel builds ratings and marketing momentum

The channel In an effort to boost the perception of the Disney brand in the German marketplace, and upon recognizing gaps in Germany's important analogue cable distribution segment, Disney launched its first free-TV, 24-hour Disney Channel on January 17 into the country's uber-competitive TV market.

Disney continues to have a strong presence in the pay-TV arena, with Disney Cinemagic, Disney Junior and Disney XD, and maintains a 50% stake in joint-venture Super RTL. But VP & GM for German-speaking Europe, Lars Wagner, says the new free channel will go a long way towards helping sustain the Disney brand in the country for years to come. "We knew if we wanted to help create a meaningful outlet for everything the Disney company has to offer, then launching our own channel would be instrumental," he says.

So far, the investment is paying off. Since its debut, the channel has quickly established itself as a top destination for kids and adults with a reach of more than 36.6 million viewers in Germany as of May 12. In fact, TV ratings for the German-language channel's first 100 days on-air were so strong, the launch stands as the most successful by a new TV broadcaster in Germany in 15 years, according to data from metrics service AGF/GfK Fernsehforschung. As a complete 360-degree launch, the channel also debuted online with live streaming and seven-day catch-up services.

Wagner says the channel's concept is unique because it had to be customized to address specific aspects of German culture. "In Spain and other parts of Europe, kids are allowed to watch TV longer in the evenings, compared to Germany, where the remote control goes to mom and dad at 8:15 p.m. There is some co-viewing, but kids, for the most part, have to go to bed, which is a big cultural difference," he says. And to accommodate, the new channel broadcasts more adult-skewing content during primetime from Disney-owned ABC and ABC Family and third-party distributors.

The programming Instead of relying solely on Disney's vast library of titles, Disney Channel Germany is serving up a balanced mix of new and existing programs—animation and live-action sitcoms during the day, and more adult-oriented programs and classic Disney movies for primetime. "We're adding 450 new episodes over the first six months—and this is just for daytime kids programming," says Wagner.

Among its top-performing preschool shows are Disney originals *Jake and the Never Land Pirates*, *Sofia the First* and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, while popular shows *Good Luck Charlie*, *Dog with a Blog*, *Jessie* and *Phineas & Ferb* have been ratings leaders with kids. According to AGF/GfK Fernsehforschung, Disney Channel's daytime market share for viewers three to 13 was 9% in April, up from 8.5% in March and 7.2% in February.

In primetime, classic Disney animated movies including *The Lion King*, *Lady and the Tramp*, and Pixar's *Ratatouille* have helped attract more adults. Within its first 100 days on-air, the channel has reached every second viewer in the 14- to 49-year-old segment, and has drawn a 1.5% market share of women across the same demo in primetime, driven by series like *Switched at Birth*, *Gilmore Girls* and *Bunheads*.

Next up With a brand-new in-house ad sales department and the largest marketing campaign Disney has ever mounted in Germany, Wagner expects more healthy growth for the channel, and for the kids market in general. "We want to make the kids market more dynamic, attractive and bigger, with more kids watching kid-specific channels," he says. Looking ahead, the channel plans fresh new content investment in local productions for primetime, sitcoms, reality shows, and adult-oriented primetime series with a focus on female-skewing drama.

—Jeremy Dickson

Hit ABC Family primetime drama *Switched at Birth* has helped attract more women to Disney Channel Germany

JustLaunched

Steven Universe



When executives at Cartoon Network first got a taste of the original concept behind new animated series *Steven Universe*, created by *Adventure Time* writer and storyboard artist Rebecca Sugar, they knew they had a potential hit in the making. Inspired by Sugar's relationship with her little brother, the original *Steven Universe* short was quickly greenlit for 13 episodes and bowed in the US on November 4, 2013. It's CN's first show with a solo female creator in 21 years. Currently a ratings leader among boys, and a growing favorite with girls, the series is rolling out worldwide.

Rebecca Sugar's Cartoon Network series draws top ratings and a growing girl audience

Show buzz *Steven Universe* follows the misadventures of a lovable boy named Steven, the ultimate little brother in a family of magical guardians of humanity—Crystal Gems (Garnet, Amethyst and Pearl). The series unfolds as Steven discovers he is a half-Gem with powers that originate from a jewel in his bellybutton. According to Cartoon Network VP of consumer marketing Scott Thomas, the show was the network's top-ranked program on Monday nights among boys six to 11 and nine to 14 from its US launch to April 18, 2014, averaging 2,021,000 viewers ages two and up per telecast. Notably, viewership grew with girls ages nine to 14 by 16%, and girls two to 11 by 1%, over the same time period. "We would love to see the kids numbers increase, and getting *Steven* in front of a girls audience in the six to 11 demo is the best opportunity for that," says Thomas. "We firmly believe the show is something girls will connect with. We saw this in research and we're seeing it now. Not that it is a girly show, but it does have Rebecca's inherent sensibility, which provides a slightly different take on a budding superhero."

For its rollout strategy, the show's original pilot launched online in May 2013 and was followed up by streaming the first episode on cartoonnetwork.com and YouTube about a month before the series' television debut. And based on early fan reaction, research and Cartoon Network's positive feelings about the show, an additional 13 episodes were greenlit 10 days after its premiere, with 26 more getting the go-ahead a few weeks later.

Fan favorite Launched as a tentpole show, the *Steven Universe* multi-platform promotional campaign spans social media, web and mobile gaming, apps, licensing and television. One unique aspect of the campaign that really took off was Fan Art Fridays on Facebook. "We were inundated with fans wanting to draw the Gems, Steven and the temple, so we just kept that going," says Thomas. "We thought it might be a momentary social stunt, but we continue to see kids and young adults engage with us." He adds that fans have even taken to creating their own Tumblr pages to encourage more drawing. "There is something about the show where fans want to connect with it in a different way."

On the licensing front, Cartoon Network's partnership with apparel manufacturer Mighty Fine launched a *Steven Universe* design contest at welovefine.com in April, where fans could submit artwork based on the show to win prizes and have their designs printed on merchandise.

What's next Now that the series has premiered across North America, EMEA, LATAM and Asia Pacific, Thomas says it continues to rate well. The network is now looking for different promotable moments within the show, beyond the premiere and finale. "We just had one centered around the 'Giant Woman' episode, where Pearl and Amethyst fuse to create an all-new Gem. It pulled a nice number for us."

—Jeremy Dickson

On-air



Pipeline

An early peek at shows on the development track

preschool



Hi Opie! It's the first year of kindergarten for five-year-old puppet Opie and his real-kid friends in this new live-action preschool series that follows Opie's personal growth as he copes with the uncertainties of his new surroundings, and learns more about himself, his friends and his teachers with every passing day. Created by Barbara Slade (*Angelina Ballerina*, *Rugrats*) and shot in Toronto, each episode features a clear goal that can be attained by learning through play, which includes the processes of asking questions, fighting through adversity, experimenting with the consequences of one's actions, being curious and using imagination. Larry Mirkin (*Fraggle Rock*) is the series' producer, with Kate Barris as executive story editor, and Lowell Dean as producer/director. Executive producer credits go to Henson's Halle Stanford and Lisa Henson, as well as marbledmedia's Mark Bishop and Matt Hornburg.

Co-producers: marbledmedia (Canada) and The Jim Henson Company (US), developed in partnership with Canadian provincial broadcaster TVOntario

Style: Live action with puppets

Format: 13 x half hours/39 x seven minutes

Budget: Approximately US\$137,000 per episode

Delivery: August 2014

Status: In post-production and is set to air on TVO, City Saskatchewan and Knowledge Network (British Columbia) later this year. An extensive interactive component is expected, and marbledmedia's Distribution360 is sharing TV, DVD and digital distribution with The Jim Henson Company, which is also overseeing global format and licensing rights.

kids
4 to 8



Co-Producers: m4e AG (Germany), Absolutely Cuckoo (London), Telegael (Ireland)

Style: CGI animation with detailed hand-texturing

Format: 52 x seven minutes

Budget: Approximately US\$6 million

Delivery: Spring 2015

Status: Heading into full production this month. A bible and trailer are available, while scripts are in progress. UK-based Channel 5's Milkshake block is on-board as anchor broadcaster, and pre-sales are starting at Annecy. m4e will also look for licensing and distribution opportunities.

Wissper This new CGI-animated series follows the adventures of a little girl who lives an ordinary life except for one thing: She can talk to animals—big and small—around the world. The young animal whisperer senses the creatures' feelings, empathizes with them, and helps solve their problems. Absolutely Cuckoo's Dan Good (*Waybuloo*) created the series based on his own daughter, who thinks their family's seven pets understand her, and thus, she never stops chatting with them. The show's curriculum focuses on working as a team to solve problems, and using creativity to appreciate individual strengths and overcome obstacles.



Disney Junior's newest series, space-themed *Miles from Tomorrowland* is set to air in summer 2015, and land at retail within 90 days of its debut

Next stop, Tomorrowland

DCP appoints Tomy as master toy partner for the latest Disney Junior series, while the properties under the TV-driven umbrella brand continue to conquer at retail

BY GARY RUSAK

Disney Junior has rightfully earned its Midas-like reputation. When it comes to turning new preschool properties into gold, you don't have to look any further than the retail and ratings performance of *Doc McStuffins*, *Sofia the First*, *Jake and the Never Land Pirates* and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*. And the newest channel in Disney's entertainment empire now has its sights set on making *Miles from Tomorrowland* its next TV and consumer products hit.

"The series is about one of the first families living in outer space," explains Nancy Kanter, EVP of original programming & GM for Disney Junior Worldwide. "The family is helping to build the universe's first intergalactic highway."

The nuclear family at the heart of the adventure includes eight-year-old Miles, older sister Loretta, mom (Captain Phoebe), engineer dad Leo, and Miles' best friend—a robotic ostrich named Marc.

A brainchild of long-time Disney scribe Sascha Paladino, the kernel of the idea for the series immediately caught the attention of the top programming brass at Disney Junior. "We loved it and we felt it was unique," says Kanter. "There have been other shows that have taken place in space, but this has the perfect combination of exciting space adventures and family. The entry point is really the heart and emotion."

The initial 24 half-hour eps (each split into two 11-minute segments) will take advantage of a rich setting with an

appropriately futuristic bent, featuring technological gadgets and distant planets rooted in both science fiction and fact. Kanter says that part of the delight of developing the series was consulting with a number of different technical and scientific advisors.

"Some of the things we learned, we put right into the script," she says. "We were told that there are areas in space called 'Goldilocks Zones'—areas around stars that aren't too hot or too cold to sustain life. So we built an episode around the search for one of those zones."

While there is a STEM curriculum underpinning the series, Kanter says that Disney Junior is always cognizant of serving the story and narrative, first and foremost. "We try to bake the learning piece into everything," she says. "A lot of that is on a social and emotional level rather than technical, and we don't stop the story in order to explain."

Early feedback indicates that while the new series was designed to serve kids two to seven, its appeal might indeed be wider in terms of age and gender. "We are seeing that girls are as interested and engaged in the topics as boys," notes Kanter. "We believe it will hit a very broad demo."

CP plans for tomorrow, retail sales for today

The consumer products strategy for *Tomorrowland* will capitalize on Disney Junior's successful track record and the goodwill it has across all US retail tiers. To wit, the first

SKUs from *Miles from Tomorrowland*'s newly appointed master toy partner Tomy will hit retail within a 90-day window of the series' summer 2015 broadcast premiere. Gone are the days of a 12- to 18-month window to get product on the shelf, says Josh Silverman, EVP of global licensing for Disney Consumer Products, explaining consumer affinity for Disney Junior's properties does not require a long gestation period.

"It's a unique strategy," he says, adding that the success of the Doc McStuffins, Sofia the First, Jake and the Never Land Pirates, and Mickey Mouse Clubhouse licensing programs have convinced retailers to further expand their offerings under the Disney Junior umbrella and take on its new IP without waiting for TV ratings results. "I feel comfortable bringing *Miles from Tomorrowland* to retailers and our licensee partners, because I know our shows are amazing," he adds.

The retail placement numbers seem to bear him out. Disney Junior's global retail sales more than doubled to \$1.8 billion for fiscal 2013. And in terms of shelf space, the channel's properties have doubled their in-line space at major US retailers from holiday 2012 to holiday 2013. And in holiday 2014, they'll have 95 feet at the big US mass-market outlets like Walmart and Target, plus incremental promotional space.

According to New York-based market research firm The NPD Group, Disney Junior's Doc McStuffins and Sofia the First accounted for two of the top five properties in absolute dollar growth last year. And while the toy category is the major driver of Disney Junior's host of properties, its successes have not been limited to that aisle. According to health & beauty giant Johnson & Johnson, Doc McStuffins is projected to be the number-one girls license for its Band-Aid brand this year. Sofia the First bedding, meanwhile, is currently the bestselling bedding at Walmart, Toys 'R' Us and Bed, Bath &

Beyond in the US. And in the booming construction category, Disney has already inked deals to expand its Lego Duplo partnerships, adding two new Jake and the Never Land Pirates and Sofia the First SKUs in 2014, with more on the way for 2015.

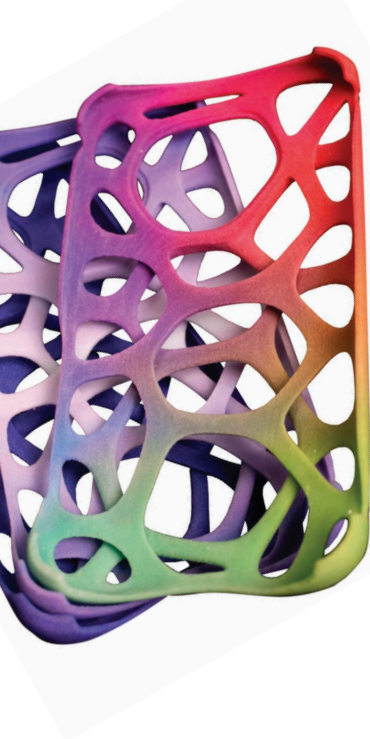
Silverman says that while the *Miles from Tomorrowland* program will follow suit with a robust and wide-ranging product assortment, the initial focus is on getting the Tomy toy line off and running, as it zeroes in on a boys four to six demo with its space-adventure play pattern.

"Tomy just caught the soul and the spirit of the show," says Silverman. "They really nailed it. It's a toyetic show with a fantastic core play component. There is a great line of figures and role and vehicle play, and they really captured the futuristic gadget aspect of the series."

With a growing portfolio of hot properties that hit numerous genres and play patterns, Silverman says the challenge for the Disney Junior portfolio, from a consumer products standpoint, is keeping up with growing retail expectations and making sure each property is given the oxygen it needs to continue to grow its reach. "The toughest part is finding ways to nurture them all," he says. "It's a healthy problem to have." ❧



Disney Junior's Doc McStuffins (right) and Sofia the First were two of the top-five properties in absolute dollar growth in 2013



LicenseeLowdown

3D printing moves into licensing

Who: Rock Hill, South Carolina-based 3D Systems has been in the 3D printer space since the late 1980s and is now helping to deliver the hot technology to consumers. "Now we sell our machines at Staples," notes Keith Ozar, director of marketing and consumer products at the company. 3D Systems' consumer-grade 3D printers can be purchased for around US\$1,000, and the company has set up its own platform (www.cubify.com) where users can download files that can be converted into any number of consumer products, including basic toys, home décor and tools.

What: Early this year, the company announced a deal in principle with Pawtucket, Rhode Island toyco Hasbro to co-develop immersive toys utilizing 3D Printing technology. It has also purchased L.A.-based Gentle Giant Studios, which specializes in 3D modeling in the entertainment space, including scanning actors for CGI effects. "We see these partnerships as a good way to enter the kids and entertainment space," says Ozar. Currently, 3D Systems' burgeoning roster of licenses includes Star Wars, NBA, Star Trek, Walking Dead and Lord of the Rings. Ozar adds that the company is actively looking to sign up more properties and expand its offerings in the toy and collectibles realm.

Latest innovation: In January, the company introduced the ChefJet 3D printers—a kitchen-ready 3D printer category that produces edible products. The company has also entered into a partnership with chocolate giant Hershey's to develop products. The line is set for US retail this summer, with an entry price of roughly US\$5,000. Ozar says that the area is ripe for licensing deals, and he envisions a brand-new category of personalized confections.

What's Next: Looking forward, Ozar says that the toys and entertainment spaces are a natural fit for 3D printing. "People spend hours creating an avatar for a videogame online, so you can see how creating something personalized with a 3D printer would be popular," he says. Also, don't be surprised to find 3D printers integrated into videogames in the near future. "Instead of getting a digital reward in a videogame, I can imagine a 3D printer attached," he says. "You could get an actual physical reward, not just something that appears on-screen."

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—Gary Rusak



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Lyka's traveling labs—like this one that ventured to an elementary school in Sydney, Australia in April—are at the heart of the IP's design process

Far from a focus group

Noted media innovator **Lance Weiler** pulls back the curtain on the unique design process behind his 21st-century multiplatform property **Lyka's Adventure**

BY LANCE WEILER, CO-FOUNDER OF CONNECTED SPARKS

A group of children file into the room and quickly take a seat around a colorful circular carpet. Their excitement is contagious as whispers and giggles fill the air. Hidden within the classroom is Lyka, a little robot scientist with a big heart who also happens to be an interactive plush. She has traveled more than 20,000 miles and visited 68 cities since arriving on Earth. On a mission to save her home, Lyka is enlisting the help of students around the world. And on this particular morning, her traveling lab has stopped by Rosetta Primary School in Hobart, Tasmania.

As a discovery-based learning experience that includes an eight-book series, an interactive plush toy and the traveling labs, Lyka's Adventure is on a mission to make science fun while teaching students empathy, coding, rapid prototyping and collaborative problem-solving. The Lyka's Adventure labs not only teach students science, coding and storytelling, but they also serve as an R&D space to help us design in a way that reflects our core audiences' needs. We see directly what works and what doesn't—plus we are able to design with the children, as opposed to designing in a vacuum and assuming we know what works for them.

An evolving approach

In many ways, Lyka's Adventure embodies a change in how I approach the development and creation of media and intellectual property. Over the course of my career, I've written, directed and produced films and television shows, designed games, staged live events and built software. Balancing story and software development, in particular, is a recurring challenge—the two often clash due to conflicting timetables and communication hurdles that arise between diverse teams.

So when it came time to build a toy and media company for this century, the design of the operation needed to reflect the times. At Connected Sparks, we strive to create

toys and stories with passion and purpose. We build storyworlds that become educational ecosystems. Our mission is to create immersive experiences that ignite imaginations, open the design process and embrace shifts in media consumption.

But the creation of Lyka's Adventure was, in fact, fueled by a simple observation. After a Sunday family dinner, my mother ventured over to the couch

to teach my son to read. The part of their otherwise age-old exchange that struck me as unusual was that my son (who was four at the time) was teaching his grandmother how to use the tablet that housed the eBook they were reading. I found this cross-generational transfer of

knowledge fascinating, and within a few weeks I assembled a team to stage a hackathon to explore the concept.

It's normal for Connected Sparks to launch projects through an immersive lab or hack that brings together a team with varied backgrounds. Over the years, I've seen my core collaborators grow to include creative technologists, data scientists, user-experience (UX) specialists and researchers. And the most interesting ideas rest at the edges of these diverse perspectives and within the resulting friction created between disciplines and skills. These 21st-century writers rooms recognize that story can influence code/product development and vice versa. (This principal is also at the heart of a digital storytelling lab I have been developing at Columbia University in New York. Within the lab we experiment with ways in which story can help to drive innovation, bridge silos and aid diverse teams.)

Beyond the focus group

We often employ a designing "with" and "for" process that places our story and code directly in the hands of our target audience. While other industries commonly engage in R&D, this method is rarely utilized within the entertainment industry. For instance, the industry will spend time rewriting a script and then focus-test a film just prior to releasing it. But the only time it touches an audience is at the very end of the process, when it is often too late to make any changes.

" We rapidly prototype concepts in a way that invites those participating to become collaborators in the design process and not remain a largely passive audience. "

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For the past three years, we've been prototyping Lyka and her storyworld with children and parents around the globe. We've worked hard to place Lyka in environments that challenge our toys, stories and code. The results have helped us improve our products. But it's important to note that our prototyping sessions should not be equated to focus groups.

Unlike traditional focus groups, we don't create something in a vacuum and then place it in the hands of the audience to obtain feedback. Instead, we rapidly prototype concepts in a way that invites those participating in the sessions to become collaborators in the design process and not remain a largely passive audience. (A by-product of the connected world that we inhabit is the evolution of the audience. Many of its members have become their own media companies, thanks to the ability of social media and push-button publishing to get their message out easily and cheaply.)

We have found that failing quickly—and learning from it—enriches the quality of what we're building. In a sense, it is a form of re-writing. For instance, in the fall of 2011, we staged a beta test with an early version of the Lyka toy that included a number of sensors to measure geolocation and temperature. The data collected by Lyka would be pushed back to students.

Two classrooms, one in L.A. and the other in Montreal, Canada, worked together to move Lyka across North America. The students' imaginations and curriculum determined where she traveled. The test concluded with a weather balloon launch that sent our attached Lyka toy prototype 90,000 feet above Earth to the edge of the atmosphere.

The beta test provided valuable insight into what the children found engaging and what they did not. While we could have easily documented Lyka's travels and skyward ascent by compositing green-screen footage against stock backgrounds, the fact that she was actually out in the real world was thrilling for the students.

Additionally, the trip yielded a variety of assets (photos, video, stories, artwork) that we are still using today. Outside of its benefits for our development process, the beta test helped attract the interest of publisher Penguin. Intrigued by the innovative nature of the project, Penguin inked a deal with Connected Sparks that enabled collaboration on a second-screen reading application, as well as the release of the Lyka's Adventure as a book series, interactive toy and series of traveling educational labs into multiple territories, including the US, UK, Australia, Germany, France, China, Korea and Japan.

Sticking to experimentation

Back at Rosetta Primary School, a young boy has managed to discover Lyka's whereabouts. He hoists her up into the air while every one of his classmates surround him in an effort to touch her. As the students return and sit down, I ask if the class is ready to help Lyka save her home planet. The room erupts in a resounding collective "Yes!" Moments later, the children begin working in teams to aid their new friend, and



By giving kids the hands-on opportunity to interact with Lyka prototypes, creator Connected Sparks has found an R&D space that is "brutally honest"

the classroom transforms into a collaborative problem-solving space right before our eyes.

But the students are not the only ones learning. As I look around the room, I'm struck by the fact that we've created the same type of cross-generational knowledge exchange that inspired the project in the first place. My team and I are learning every time we run a lab. We're able to experiment and try new things in an effort to improve the design and educational value of what we're building. And we have found an R&D space that is brutally honest in its response. As I assist one of the students with the rocket she's building to help Lyka return home, I ask her what she thinks is important for Lyka to learn on Earth. Without missing a beat, she says, "Mistakes are welcome—because that is how you learn."

Lyka's Adventure is an ongoing experiment, an ambitious storyworld that spills off pages, screens and into the real world. By opening our design process we hope to build quality products with passion and purpose because this adventure is not about the destination but the journey. **K**

Lance Weiler is a co-founder of Connected Sparks (www.connect-edsparks.com), a company that creates toys and stories with passion and purpose. Lyka's Adventure is the company's first product release. Named by *BusinessWeek* as one of the 18 who changed Hollywood, Lance teaches at Columbia University, sits on a steering committee for the World Economic Forum on the future of entertainment, and has worked with the UN, UNICEF and others on initiatives that mix storytelling, technology and social good.

DWA's spring 2015 release *Home* is zoning in on the currently sizzling market for girl-skewing properties



Finding Home

DreamWorks looks to the girls aisle for its new film-based CP program

The consumer products push for DreamWorks Animation's upcoming feature has set its sights on a demo traditionally under-served by movie programs. "When you hear that it's an 'aliens invading planet Earth' movie, you automatically think boys action, but that couldn't be further from the truth," says Tim Erickson, head of global hardlines at DWA.

Erickson is describing the studio's upcoming CGI-animated feature *Home*, scheduled to hit theaters around the globe on March 27, 2015. With an A-list voice cast that includes Steve Martin, Jim Parsons and Rihanna, the film is being touted as a family-friendly adventure, but the bulk of its related consumer products will be targeted towards tween girls. "We are coming in with a fresh approach to the girls aisle," he contends.

The film follows alien O (*Big Bang Theory*'s Jim Parsons) and human girl Tip (pop star Rihanna) as they set

out on a globe-spanning adventure. The nature of the film fits perfectly with the program's large plush component, led by master toy partner KIDdesigns in Rahway, New Jersey. It will also have a heavy emphasis on accessories and softlines. "Our accessory partners did a great job of speaking to the moods and relationships of the characters, and there is also a lot of collectability to them," says Ann Buckingham, head of global softlines at DWA. Music will also drive further engagement. A dedicated *Home* soundtrack, being performed by Rihanna, is expected to appeal to the same girls seven to 12 demo.

"The movie focuses quite a bit on emotions and relationships, and that comes out in the products," says Buckingham. In terms of licensing deals, FAB is producing bags, backpacks and home décor. HER Accessories has signed on for jewelry and hair accessories, while Freeze will be handling t-shirts and fleece apparel.

Buckingham says the partners were eager to work with a fresh girl-skewing property. All in all, 50 different SKUs are currently lined up to hit mid-tier, specialty and mass retail before the film's debut next March. "It wasn't a challenge to sign up partners," she says. "We showed them something they hadn't seen before and something that really speaks to what consumers are looking for today."

In terms of retail placement, DreamWorks has partnered with accessories retailer Claire's, which will be the mall-exclusive retailer for jewelry and accessories, while Toys 'R' Us has committed to an endcap and an assortment that highlights KIDdesigns' plush. In terms of big-box retailers Target and Walmart, DWA head of global retail sales and trade marketing, Kelli Corbett, says the girl-skewing nature of the program will open up new store real estate for program. "Our biggest opportunity with those retailers is looking for placement outside the toy and book aisles and to leverage the upcoming Rihanna CD," she says.

The widespread retail buy-in and high expectations are the result of a coordinated and long-term plan that represents how Erickson wants to see the studio's projects handled from now on. The company mandate is to get the consumer products teams working with a project from its inception and presenting potential retail partners with a full multi-year plan. "It's not an event film, it's a franchise," explains Erickson.

Corbett says retailers, which are looking for more than one window of product sell-through, appreciate the message. "When we talk to retailers, we are talking about a four-year content plan to support our properties," she says. "We are looking at it from a continuous content perspective."

While the CP program targets girls, Buckingham sees a comparison with last year's biggest animated hit that proves that a film can appeal to both sexes. "*Frozen* hit a cross-gender audience," she says. "*Home* will do that, too. It's really about the story and how that will connect with individual kids." —Gary Rusak



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The Story of Me

Nick hones in on what makes up the world of post-millennials, from family to media habits

BY ERIN MILLER

In the last few editions of Kaleidoscope, we've been focused on today's post-millennial kids, whom we define as those being born in (or after) 2005, and are nine years old and younger. Understanding this cohort—what shapes who they are and what makes up their lives—is vital to Nickelodeon. In this month's report, we're honing in on what the world of today's kids looks like, from their family to their media habits.

The world of kids is changing, and one of the most important things to keep in mind is that Gen X-ers primarily parent today's kids—just 12% of two- to 11-year-olds have millennial parents. The Gen X parent is exceptionally kid-focused and determined to ensure their kids have a happy childhood. The parent-child relationship has never been closer. Looking at today's households—20% of kids live in a single-parent household, and 14% have a grandparent living with them. The median family household income is around US\$60,000 and there are 2.6 kids per household. When we asked kids where their favorite place to be was, their number-one response, at 75%, was at home. This is where they feel safe, protected and comfortable expressing themselves.

When examining how kids feel, we found that they're in no hurry to grow up, and family is everything to them. Not only are families spending more time together, but eight in 10 kids wish they could spend even more time with their mom and dad. When it comes to siblings, eight in 10 kids feel extremely close to their sibling, with six in 10 saying they consider their siblings "friends." The sibling relationship is unique in that it's simply the longest relationship kids will most likely have. So, it isn't surprising to hear kids think that a sibling is someone they would do anything for, and who understands what is important for them.

Today's kid is also happy, as nine in 10 report they feel happy. They're happy with their age and being kids, and they have a strong sense of self. When choosing statements to describe themselves, they believe they're nice to people, smart and that they make their parents happy. These are key in how they demonstrate self-confidence, though there are some important differences. First, kids today are much less confident in the world around them than millennials were at the same age. At the same time, they're more confident in themselves and in their abilities. Kids firmly believe—96%, in fact—that they can attain any goal they aspire to, as long as they are willing to work for it. A full 93% expect nothing but the best from themselves and they will not settle for less than what makes them happy, and nine in 10 kids believe that all their goals are in reach.

When diving into kids' media habits, they're finding time to be entertained by multiple screens, but TV still rules. The majority of kids' time spent on entertainment occurs through TV. We also know that TV is still their entry point for long-form content. Despite all the alternatives at their fingertips, TV usage levels among kids continue to increase. The advent of the DVR and the ability to easily time-shift is certainly an option for kids, but the reality is that the vast majority of their TV viewing is done live. But as new platforms and devices emerge, kids are incorporating them into their media diet, and their time spent with each device is growing. Our research shows that the more devices there are in the home, the more consumption occurs, but TV time still trumps time spent on the computer, smartphone or tablet. Computer usage has held steady year-on-year. And while smartphone usage is up, it's not increasing as dramatically as tablet usage, which has more than doubled.

The media story for kids really revolves around how they are adapting to the changing media landscape, and finding time to fit it all into their daily lives. Although it may seem daunting to adults, to kids it's just what they do. They know no other world and navigate this one easily and confidently. So while a common perception is that the media landscape is becoming more fragmented, for kids it's all about media multiplication—when it comes to kids and media, more is more. **K**

This concludes part one of our research on the makeup of today's kids. In part two, we'll report on how dynamics may differ among Hispanic households.

For more information, contact Kaleidoscope@nick.com

(Source: Nickelodeon Group Consumer Insights Research, "The Story of Me," Fall 2013)

A major focus of the Brand and Consumer Insights Department at Nickelodeon Kids & Family is to live and breathe kid culture. We continually track and identify trends, and explore what it means to be a kid and teen today. In an effort to keep you in touch with our audience and give a voice to our consumer, we've created the Nickelodeon Kaleidoscope. Every month, Kaleidoscope will capture key areas of interest across the kid and family cultural landscape, provide an understanding of attitudes and behaviors, and report on trends and buzz.

Muse of the Month

New Normal

Michigan-born Jason deserves to see on-screen families more like his own



Nine-year-old Jason experienced something that many kids go through—the blending of a family. When his dad was offered a new job in a different city, he, his sister, and his dad picked up and moved from Michigan to North Dakota to live with his aunt, uncle and cousins. Overnight, Jason went from being in a family of three to a family of seven.

When talking about what family means to him, Jason instantly recites a long list of names ranging from his aunt to his seven dogs. “A family is people who take care of each other. We have fun, but we also solve big problems together.” Everyone plays a unique role. “My aunt makes decisions. My dad does the dishes and feeds the horses. My sister, cousin, and I are the kids, but we do chores, too.”

Jason doesn’t see his family as different from others, but he does see a discrepancy between the families he knows and the ones he typically sees in movies and on TV. “I guess we are a mix of *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Full House* and [National Geographic’s] *Dr. Pol*. We have a lot of animals and a lot of people to help out, plus we like hunting.” None of these portrayals are fully spot-on, though.

Throughout the years, families have evolved on-screen from *Ozzie and Harriet* to *The Brady Bunch*, *Punky Brewster* and *Modern Family*. But there is still room for progress. The new generation of kids deserves to see their family structures accurately reflected in commercials, shows and movies. By understanding they are part of the new normal, it will help kids like Jason connect and engage with the content. —Amanda Rosenburg



Insight Kids is a research and strategic consulting company dedicated to catalyzing our clients to build innovative, impactful and inspiring experiences for kids and families. To be further inspired by Jason and Insight Kids, visit www.insightstrategygroup.com/insightkids/.

Cool or Not? The music edition



Lorde
(singer)

Boys 8 to 11 (172)	Girls 8 to 11 (211)	Boys 12 to 15 (194)	Girls 12 to 15 (224)		Boys 8 to 11 (201)	Girls 8 to 11 (191)	Boys 12 to 15 (229)	Girls 12 to 15 (204)
32.6%	52.6%	15.5%	30.4%	Totally way cool *	56.2%	45.5%	37.1%	42.2%
20.9%	18.5%	21.1%	23.7%	Very cool *	16.4%	19.9%	21.4%	25.5%
20.9%	18.0%	28.4%	22.8%	Kinda cool *	12.4%	14.7%	21.0%	17.2%
8.7%	3.8%	13.4%	11.2%	Not cool *	4.0%	5.8%	7.4%	9.3%
16.9%	7.1%	21.6%	12.1%	Totally un-cool *	10.9%	14.1%	13.1%	5.9%
36.8%	21%	26%	14.2%	Don't know what it is	25.3%	29.8%	13.6%	22.1%



Imagine Dragons
(band)

* Excludes “Don’t know what it is” responses



Cool or Not? is part of KidSay’s Feb/Mar 2014 Trend Tracker. These one-of-a-kind research reports are published 10 times a year and provide a quantitative and qualitative picture of kids’ likes, dislikes and trends gathered through in-school surveys with US kids ages five to 15. Contact Bob Reynolds (913-390-8110 or bob@kidsay.com).

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HitStreak is ShowMobile's first original series

On the road

New app *ShowMobile* is going after the heart of tween and teen culture with content that integrates music, social media and Instagram-driven eps. Welcome to the dawn of the “Instasode.”

BY WENDY
GOLDMAN GETZLER

Tweens and teens have long marched to the beat of their own drums. But currently, those tunes are more than likely emanating from a mobile device. In fact, last year Pew Research found that 78% of US teens own a cell phone, and 25% of those aged 12 to 17 consider themselves “cell-mostly” internet users.

It's figure like these—and his 20-plus years in the music industry—that led former Britney Spears producer Eric Foster White to launch Denver, Colorado-based ShowMobile, a new COPPA-compliant mobile platform that aggregates exclusive music-themed content and social media activity in one centralized hub. The app's potential rests in rich advertising opportunities, as well as collaborations with influential stars like YouTube phenomenon Austin Mahone. But Show-

Mobile—especially if it carves out a new niche—is as much a sign of how entertainment execs are adapting to where kids are, as opposed to re-directing them to traditional mediums.

“Media companies are using tools to drive this young generation back to experiences that they’ve already abandoned. We saw that they are constantly checking Facebook, Twitter and YouTube clips, so we decided to create a scripted show that’s constantly updated online,” says White of ShowMobile’s inaugural series, *HitStreak*. “If you are going to tell a story across the portals kids use, you need tech to centralize it. They aren’t going to chase you across different platforms. So that’s the genesis behind our tech.”

So far, this approach has struck a chord with its intended mobile demo of tweens and teens, as the app has garnered close to 42 million video views on YouTube, four million in-app episodic views and two million social engagements since launching last October.

The original made-for-mobile family series *HitStreak* follows the lives of four aspiring teenage singers in Miami working to make their dreams of becoming pop sensations a reality, one that is steeped in real time.

The series pulls together different social media activities into one channel that features a six-minute episode of traditional video every week, which is accompanied by scripted social networking on the part of the cast. For example, when a cast member is texting, his or her messages pop up on fans' mobile screens (via a proprietary video-to-text function), and three or more times a day, a cast member will engage in a social element such as posting a picture or video on Instagram that furthers the storyline.

"We call those an Instasode," says White. "And the next morning, fans will check their phones right away and find a Facebook status update from a character. That afternoon, two cast members could text one another and fans will receive their 'private' messages."

ShowMobile's second channel came courtesy of pop star Austin Mahone, who launched his branded channel on the app in May with the intention of aggregating all of his social media activity in one place.

It's a sensible collaboration, given that the 18-year-old's popularity is rooted in the world of social media, having received public notice as a YouTube star à la Justin Bieber back in 2011. To date, he's enlisted more than a million YouTube subscribers and more than six million Twitter followers.

Mahone's presence on the new *ShowMobile* channel will allow his fans to earn ShowMobile stars, which can be used to buy virtual goods and to qualify for and win fan experiences and prizes. Plus, fans who download the *ShowMobile* app will get a first glimpse of the exclusive content contained on the Austin Mahone channel.

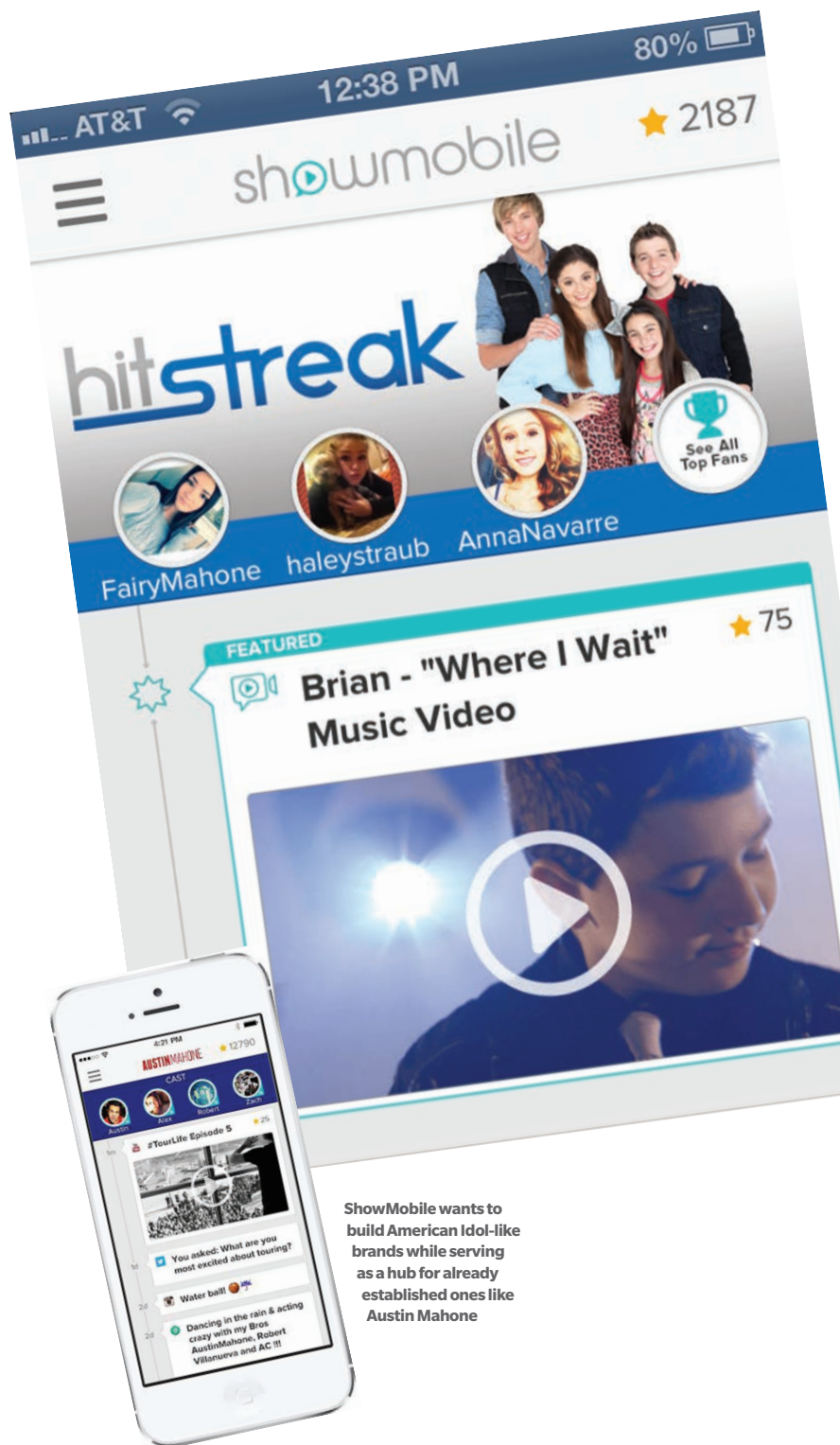
In partnerships like these, ShowMobile will share revenue for virtual goods and in-app advertising. And the company is already benefiting from its association with the superstar, who drove 40,000 new users to the app in the partnership's first 10 days. Aside from gaining users, ShowMobile's other main focus is branded advertising. The texting component of the app has positive implications for advertisers that can offer discounted coupons directly via the phones of their target demographic.

"That's a huge ad unit for the right advertiser that can target gender, too. They can leave mobile coupons in users' text feeds, and then we can use analytics to gauge interaction," says White. "Virtual goods—which form a multi-billion-dollar annual industry—are also a huge driver of activity on the app."

To be sure, the platform can't store personal information about anyone under the age of 13, as White points out that it was his goal to meet all COPPA guidelines without any shade of doubt. It's a necessity, given that roughly 80% of the *ShowMobile* app's users are under 18 (76% of users are female).

"This is the pot-of-gold demo," he says. "Everyone wants to reach these kids in authentic ways."

White says the American Idol-like potential of a series like *HitStreak* is also keeping momentum alive at the young company, which intends to sign performers, including full bands, and delve further into music-based publishing.



ShowMobile wants to build American Idol-like brands while serving as a hub for already established ones like Austin Mahone

"We didn't build ShowMobile to ease the universal music industry pain. If you told people 10 years ago that Justin Bieber or Austin Mahone would exist—kids who made their careers on their own—they'd think you were crazy," says White. "Now, you don't necessarily have to be the best, but you have to have a social media appeal or a value proposition. And the old gatekeepers are playing catch-up."

Beyond music, ShowMobile intends to step foot inside fashion, beauty and gaming content, with the goal of creating a full mobile multi-channel network by this fall. **k**



New Kid in Town

Custom tailoring

Imagimod is banking on Kickstarter and the allure of 3D printing to bring customizable figures to tabletops everywhere

Making it Connecticut-based Imagimod may have a new generation of 3D toy designers on its hands. The startup launched a Kickstarter campaign this spring in the lead-up to the fall 2014 launch of *Mech Maker*, an iOS app that lets the creative class make its own physical robot-like figures from thousands of parts, colors and patterns and then print these customized creations as 3D objects. Imagimod is an offshoot of creative and toy design studio Killer Minnow, whose clients include Lego, Hasbro and Nickelodeon. The company was launched last fall by CEO Kevin Bradshaw, who felt that the ongoing trend of mixing digital and physical gaming spoke directly to his own work background. Four co-founders, some

angel investment and a Kickstarter campaign later, the figurines are ready to take on the mobile-toy space. Of course, beyond funding and a willing consumer, the most important dimension to *Mech Maker*'s success is the 3D printer, which Bradshaw says is on the cusp of ubiquity.

Takeaways "3D printers are available now for under US\$1,000, and this holiday, they will be the biggest personal item of the year," says Bradshaw. *Mech Maker* lets users print their customized creations via their own printer at home, or through a company that may have fulfillment options such as Walmart or a local comic shop (the app will offer a directory). Users can also fulfil their orders through Imagimod. The figures, at a few inches tall, will be printable in plastic for US\$15 to US\$20. While *Mech Maker* stands as the first Imagimod product out of the gate, the general idea and hope for the concept is to minimize any gap between mobile devices and 3D objects. "We are already talking to gaming companies that can harness this technology and use it for anything that has a personalization element to it. So, imagine pausing play and printing a character from any game," says Bradshaw. "The Hasbros of the world are great at creating something and making a million of it, but the 3D printer speaks to one unit of production and is tied to customization. And a lot of people are spending lots of money to play with figurines."

Future plans The company is hoping that these people are drawn to *Mech Maker*, and Imagimod is busy building a gaming community for those ages 13 and up that will sync with the app and physical objects. The community will be able to create rules and share them with one another, not unlike *Minecraft* and other inhabitants of the DIY gaming universe. "With the physical Mech Makers, you can bash them around like a kid or create a real formal collectible structure," Bradshaw says. But before things get physical, the small Imagimod team needs to iron out kinks that were brought to its attention during the initial Kickstarter campaign. (In May, Imagimod removed *Mech Maker* from the crowdsourcing site to fix features such as paint options.) Also top of mind for the team is the inherent licensing potential that abounds with this mobile 3D technology. "Think of the biggest IPs that have robot-like creatures in them," says Bradshaw. "We could be close to tapping into those. The platform can move in different directions based on new character IP development."

—Wendy Goldman Getzler

The Digits

Numbers that speak volumes about kids and technology

A survey of more than 300 online media buyers shows that

41%

of them want to increase YouTube spending over the next year
(OpenSlate)

Thanks in part to the proliferation of tablets and eReaders, the percentage of

13-year-olds

reading print books weekly has dropped from 70% to 53% over the past 30 years
(Common Sense Media)



Photo: Maria Elena

Chickadee and egg? Fussier and tired babies are found to be spending more time than their calmer counterparts in front of

TV and tablet screens

(The American Academy of Pediatrics)

Flashback: In the 1990s, Nintendo accounted for

10%

of mega retailer Walmart's profits

(Console Wars: Sega, Nintendo, and the Battle That Defined a Generation)



Photo: matt/ome_38



Cracking co-branding

In a risk-averse climate, co-branding can often be the answer to landing retail placement and driving revenue. And when it works, it really works—see February’s *The Lego Movie*. But what about when it doesn’t? Experts weigh in on the benefits and risks of co-branding, and why it may just be the way forward for entertainment licensing

BY GARY RUSAK

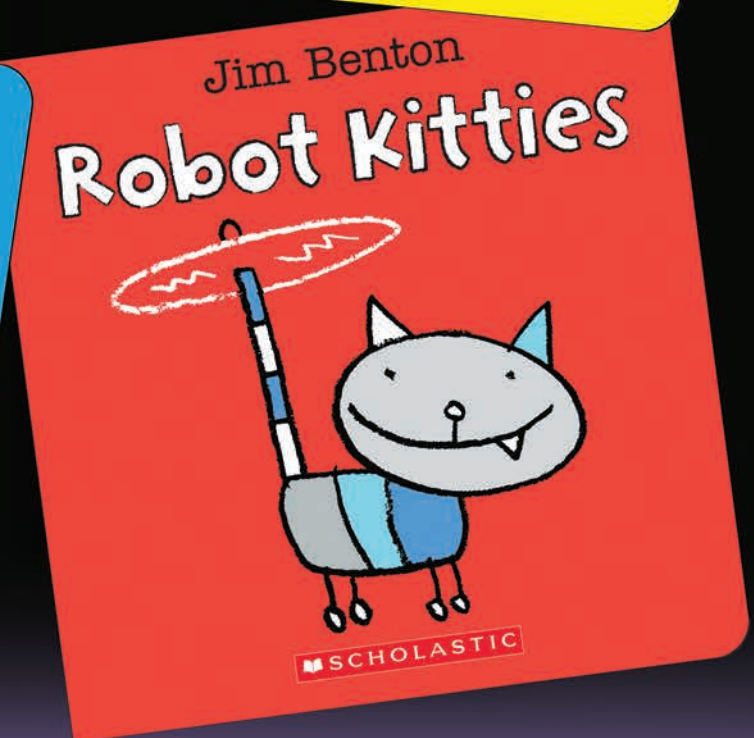
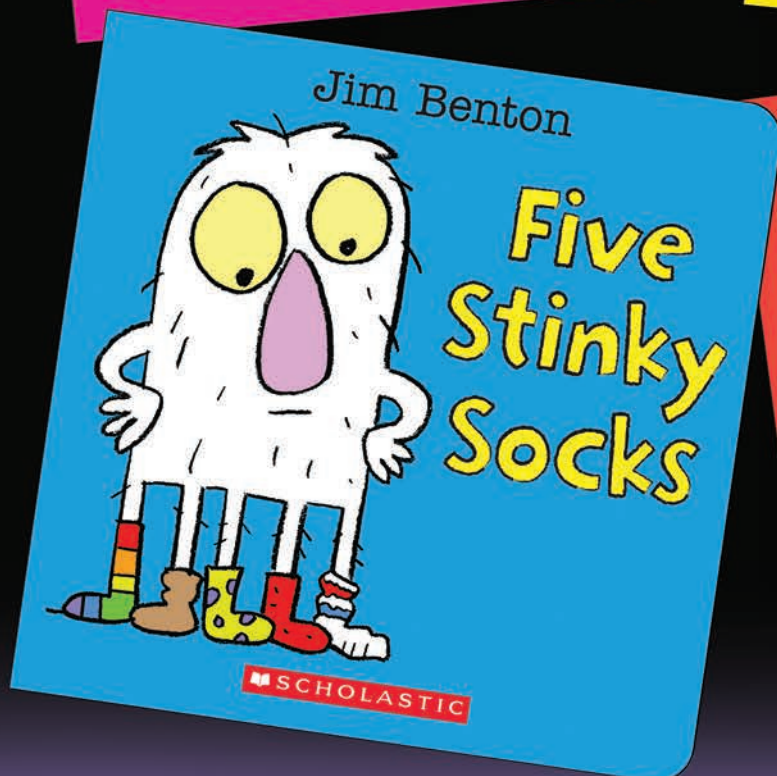
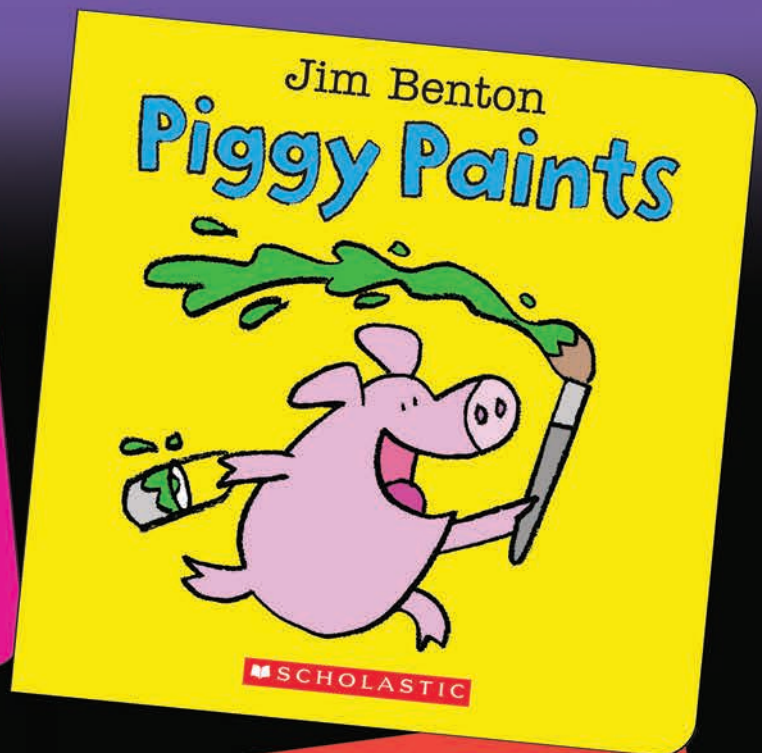
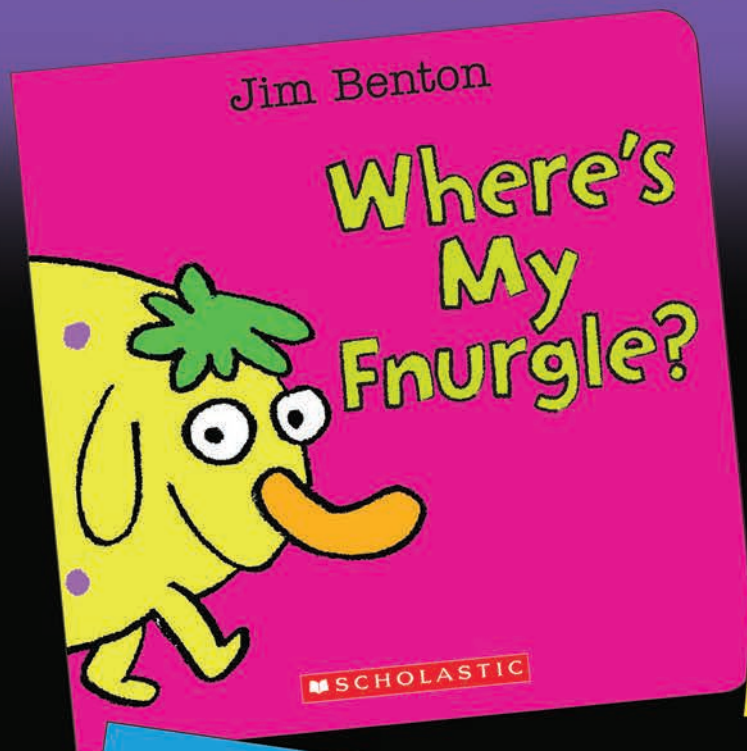
The *Lego Movie* is much more than a blockbuster film that has so far grossed more than US\$450 million worldwide on a production budget rumored to be roughly US\$65 million. Underlying the box-office receipts is the decade-long strategy that transformed the company from a construction toy-maker located in Billund, Denmark, into a global entertainment brand powerhouse.

In 1999, Lego was an established yet struggling business. However, its first-ever licensing deal signed with Lucasfilm that year marked the beginning of its tremendous turnaround. Fast-forward just a decade or so, and the toy-maker has become a US\$4.5-billion concern whose revenues have quadrupled, thanks largely to its significant expansion into licensed products. And it now sits as the world’s most profitable toy company.

With the runaway success of its first big-screen entertainment project, the secret is out—the key to Lego’s success has been in perfecting the delicate balance required to co-brand successfully. There is no better proof than the film’s almost dizzying convergence of characters within the Lego universe on-screen, including Darth Vader, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Harry Potter and Batman. The mash-ups not only captured the attention of Gen X and millennial parents, but they also served to indicate that entertainment licensing is on an increasingly integrated and co-mingled path. In fact, the way ahead for IP owners could be determined by how well they execute co-branded programs.

The Lego Movie brought an unprecedented number of IPs together in the Lego universe and achieved massive box office and retail success

we just think that everybody should
know where their Fnurgle is.



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Stay Puft Domo—a strategic partnership between Domo agent Big Tent Entertainment and Sony will see the Japanese internet icon co-mingling with 30-year-old Ghostbusters at retail this fall

One + one = three Taking a look at the tenets of a successful co-brand, and some recent examples, should shed some light on the looming mixed-up, mashed-up future of licensing. The basic concept is easy to grasp—take one brand with an established affinity and fanbase and add to it another with a slightly different following. Ideally, the pairing results in the successful extension of both properties’ reach with retailers and consumers.

The pro sports world has been rife with these types of licensing deals. Take a Garfield plush sporting a Manchester United t-shirt. “It’s a no-brainer,” says Rob Corney, Group MD of UK-based Bulldog Licensing. “Sports is advanced in this because the affinities are so strong and yet so open-ended.” He adds that it’s natural to mix a character-based IP with a sports brand because of the particular nature of sports’ allegiances.

Consider Sanrio’s Hello Kitty. Just when you thought she was already everywhere, the Japanese feline has continued to grow through innovative co-branding relationships. Her equity is such that the character is both open to interpretation and distinct enough so as not to get lost or overlooked when attached to another brand.

The L.A.-based branch of Sanrio struck a co-branding deal with US Major League Baseball three years ago. It was a concept that Dave Marchi, senior director of brand management and marketing, says initially met with some resistance from baseball executives who didn’t see the connection between the primarily girl-focused character and their male-dominated team sport. But a successful test launch in 2011 with Hello Kitty-branded Dodgers merchandise at the L.A. Dodgers’ stadium has helped the deal expand this year. All 30 MLB teams are distributing Hello Kitty co-branded plush and apparel at their stadiums and an assortment of US specialty retailers.

“It’s a bit surprising and different,” says Marchi. “But it works because the authenticity is there. There is a connection between the properties.” He contends the key to Sanrio’s co-branding success has been in carefully vetting deals, making sure that there are only a handful of them made available to consumers at one time, and establishing creative aspects that are tightly controlled. There are certain Hello Kitty attributes that are sacrosanct—her bow and eyes, in particular.

“Hello Kitty is a perfect canvas for collaborations because of how she is graphically represented,” he adds. “There is a Zen-like quality to it that can be invested with so much.”

Turning to Japan, again, we find Domo, the character created as a mascot for the country’s public broadcaster NHK in the late ’90s. He’s since emerged as a pop culture staple, guided by the licensing and marketing minds at New York-based Big Tent Entertainment. Partner and CMO Rich Maryyanek says Domo’s stewardship has been marked by the use of careful co-branding deals that have, like Hello Kitty’s, capitalized on the open-ended nature of the character itself.

“It’s instantly recognizable,” he says, explaining that Domo’s open mouth with four teeth located on top and bottom are his trademark. “But he’s an open book,” Maryyanek adds. “If I’m in a good mood, he looks happy. If I’m in a bad mood, he looks angry.”

The character’s openness makes Domo a perfect vessel for co-branding, but Maryyanek says there’s no guarantee that the character will work with everything. Much of the effort in producing success revolves around finding the right partnerships. “They have to fit,” he says. “We are a newer brand, so we want to connect with other more established iconic brands.”

For example, one of the most fruitful co-brands for Domo so far has been with DC Comics through Warner Bros. Consumer Products. The partners unveiled a plush and collectibles line in 2013 featuring Domo Batman and Domo Superman, among other characters.

“With Domo Batman, both IPs retain their own identity because they are both so strong,” says Maryyanek. “Batman’s suit and Domo’s face are so strong that they fit together to make something new without diminishing either character.”

Another Domo co-brand currently in the works is a short-term deal with Ghostbusters and its owner Sony Consumer Products. The deal is an example of a carefully planned extension that makes graphical and thematic sense. "It's a mix of two iconic figures, one that is newer and internet-based, and one that is 30 years old and from the film world," says Maryyanek. "But the connection is there. It fits, and it's a lot of fun putting them together. A co-brand has to make sense beyond being a purely financially driven exercise. There has to be a symbiosis between the brands."

Plush-driven Uglydoll is also building equity through a recent series of well-chosen co-branding programs. Somewhat new to the model, Uglydoll had its first collaboration with Sanrio, which was announced at San Diego Comi-Con last summer.

"Sanrio came to us and it seemed like a good idea," says Teresa Fazio, licensing coordinator for Pretty Ugly, the Glen Brook, New Jersey-based owner of the property. "It took two years to get to market, but it was a big hit. From there, we started working with Warner Bros. Consumer Products on DC superheroes," she says.

Fazio says owing to its recognizable look and open-ended quality, Uglydoll is constantly approached for co-branding opportunities, but the parentco is very careful when choosing partners. "We don't want to work with all

of them," she says. "Ugldoll is about being unique and accepted, and that message and attribute has to be present in the partner brand."

In a business driven by plush and accessories, Uglydoll's latest innovative co-brand is with the iconic '70s rock band KISS. "It just works well because each brand doesn't overshadow the other," she says. "It's a great way for us to introduce ourselves to the KISS fanbase and vice versa."

She says fans can suss out whether or not there is a true affinity between brands, and based upon that, if the creative output is worthwhile. "It really takes time on both sides," she says. "Each side has to understand the other brand in order to make it work."

From both the retailer and the brand owner perspective, co-brand deals are attractive. In a shaky retail climate, where buyers are leery of new, untested propositions, mixing two well-known IPs seems like a much safer bet. "The growth of co-branding that we are seeing during the economic downturn is a way for the licensing industry to breathe new life into an area that is very risk-averse," notes Corney.

Sand in the Vaseline These examples work—they illustrate how to link two separate IPs with different fanbases to create a mutually beneficial product line. The IPs must have a connection, and the execution must be thoughtful in terms of placement and distribution. In these cases, the benefits of co-branding are easy to see—each IP extends its reach and everyone goes to the bank happy. The catch, however, is that they also represent a specific form of co-branding that revolves around design or fashion brands. When it comes to an entertainment-based IP, where more sharply defined characters and narratives enter the picture, the waters get somewhat muddier.

Take a look at the cover of any celebrity tabloid to get a whiff of the potential downside to certain co-branding deals. "You absolutely benefit from each other's strength, but you suffer if there is any negativity," says Corney. "The danger is that your brand—the one you have spent all your effort protecting—is now on the apron strings of another brand that you have absolutely no control over."

Examples are plentiful in the world of sports and celebrity partnerships. Apparel and soft drink companies were fast to cut ties with the likes of Michael Jackson and Kobe Bryant when their personal lives suffered public degradation. But kids entertainment licensing characters may have a leg-up on this front, admits Corney. "You won't find a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle disappearing with a Page Three model," he jokes. But an element of risk certainly remains, he says.

"Theoretically, something could tarnish Marvel," agrees Robert Porter, toys and games analyst at London-based market research and consulting firm Euromonitor International. "The result would have a knock-on effect on Lego at this point, too."

Another potential problem is a growing number of faulty or poor executions purely driven by the bottom line



Major League Baseball execs were initially skeptical about girly Hello Kitty's sports appeal, but all 30 MLB teams now sell Kitty co-branded merch at their stadiums

that could spur a consumer backlash. “I look at some co-brands and wonder where the connection is,” says Maryy-anek. “Some make sense, but others just look like they are solely financially driven.”

Corney agrees that mismatched properties can have a jarring effect. “I don’t want to see Tom and Jerry, for example, paired with Felix the Cat or something like that,” he says. “There can be some uncomfortable fits out there that would be the result of some accountants in the basement of a film studio somewhere saying, ‘Let’s do it, it’ll make money.’”

Perhaps the most ominous potential downside in the wake of the success of *The Lego Movie* is whether or not too much of a good thing can irrevocably harm a property. “Co-branding has grown exponentially,” says Porter. “*The Lego Movie* pretty much carpet-bombed the audience with it. There is a tendency when something is so successful to sell the hell out of it, and it could, in time, actually disenfranchise the audience.”

While Porter’s words might send chills up the spines of licensing execs, he is not alone in thinking there may be a negative reaction brewing to the “more is more” ethos. “There is a real danger that it could become fatiguing for the audience,” says Corney, explaining that if everything is everywhere, there is a danger that the key attributes of successful and relatable IPs could be lost.

“Star Wars is the absolute hero in the 20th century, the way that Dickens and Shakespeare were. They all created their own universes that expressed something about the human condition that everyone could relate to,” he says. The numerous intricacies and deep history of the Star Wars universe and its characters are exactly what gives the brand its equity. It’s possible that its self-contained aspect is being threatened with every new brand extension.

“There was a line of t-shirts from [UK-based] Chunk Clothing a few years ago that was brilliant,” says Corney. “It took Star Wars characters and de-contextualized them. For example, one t-shirt had Darth Vader as a DJ spinning records at a party.” Corney adds that the execution of the line was stellar and sees it as a great extension of the Star Wars brand. But he fears there could be a deleterious element of such licensing executions that might not be realized until much later.

“There is a danger that the exposure outside of the original context in an unexpected or inappropriate environment could lessen the effect of the IP on a demographic that is not familiar with it,” he says. “Is my son going to be scared, like I was, when he sees Darth Vader for the first time in the film? Or is he going to say, ‘Oh, there is that cool guy from the t-shirt?’”

It’s a sticky proposition. If everything is everywhere, does such ubiquity lessen the original appeal of a self-contained property?

Porter also wonders if this widespread flattening effect is on the horizon. “From a corporate point of view, these companies will keep doing these deals until they stop making money,” he says. “But you can overdo something and lose the magic that made it work in the first place.”




A successful venture with Sanrio led Pretty Ugly to pair its Uglydoll with '70s rock legend KISS, but the IP owner says it's increasingly choosy about the properties it will consider for co-branding

He says he holds out hope that privately owned Lego, for one, will wade carefully into the future of licensing based upon its good track record and excellent executions. However, Porter wonders whether or not public companies that answer to shareholders, such as Disney, will display the same restraint.

In the gaming space, the company has recently introduced Infinity, an immersive videogame system that leverages a roster of hundreds of Disney IPs by placing them all within the same universe. Currently, it can rightly be considered the Everest of IP convergence.

“It is the most heavily IP-bombarded product ever made,” says Porter. “It is a powerful proposition and it’s difficult to say when—or if—the public is going to say ‘OK, I’ve had enough of all these intergradations.’” Currently, however, consumers don’t seem to be anywhere near that point when it comes to Infinity. The videogame platform and corresponding collectible figures have been selling like hotcakes. As of April 30, US sales of the US\$75 starter pack had surpassed three million units.

Corney says that when striking these deals, businesses would do well to consider the long-term ramifications of the new form of IP over-saturation. “There is a danger that it could go too far and inappropriately disassociate characters from settings and stories,” he says. “It just raises the question, ‘What is next?’ Is it possible that Darth Vader will be considered nothing more than a Lego movie character to the next generation?” 

With more misses than hits like *Frozen* lately, many US retailers have grown leery of feature film-based L&M programs. But the studios are banking on a new emphasis on quality over quantity to keep them coming back.

Disney's *Frozen* is a hands-down consumer products hit that gave US retailers a very welcome surprise this winter

Movie Licensing: The Sequel

BY BRENDAN CHRISTIE

When it comes to kids entertainment licensing, there's still plenty of green to be made from the silver screen. But licensed movie hits have been few and far between for some time. So while mass-market outlets continue to look at movie-based merchandise, they are getting choosier when it comes to placing shelf-gobbling "blockbuster" programs in their stores. In fact, there's a new landscape emerging when it comes to movie licensing in the US, where the notion of less is more is driving both retailers and studio licensors.

Shrinking flex space While total US toy sales declined by 1% last year, retail sales of licensed toys grew 3% to US\$5.3 billion, according to industry tracker The NPD Group, with licensed toys representing 29% of total brick-and-mortar toy sales and 23% of total online sales.

But when it comes to movie licensing, "there is a lot of guesswork," notes BMO Capital Markets analyst Gerrick Johnson. "Over the last 25 years, [retailers] have been guessing too high and getting stuck with a lot of leftover stuff."

As evidence, Johnson points to the fact that you can go to Toys 'R' Us right now and still find Iron Man 3

products on the shelf from May 2013. But it's not just Tony Stark that's having performance issues. Many boy-targeted lines have met the same fate lately, and retailers have had enough.

"[Retailers] keep hitting themselves over the head with these movies," notes Johnson. "But this year, they are finally going to learn their lesson." It's a learning curve that could translate into smaller retail gambles and the devotion of less prime real estate for feature programs.

In the US, for example, the three main retailers are Walmart, Target and Toys 'R' Us. Each has flex space to dedicate to merch for big film releases, if they choose. For Toys 'R' Us, that might be a 20-foot or 30-foot feature shop. For Walmart and Target, it can be specialized end-caps or trend pods. And it's in that flex space that licenses might feel the pinch most.

Johnson observes that there was no feature shop at Toys 'R' Us this time around for *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. "Toys 'R' Us would not bring in all the extra product to fill a 30-foot section at the front of the store," he notes. "They only gave it eight feet back in the action figure section. Retailers are getting a little more cautious."

A welcome cold snap You can hardly blame them. Retailers in the US have had a tough time of late with a weak economy, increased competition and consolidation, a long winter, and a shortened and difficult 2013 holiday season. And while 85% of all toys are still purchased in stores, online retail is exacerbating the problem. Parents are increasingly conducting their research online and not in-store. The consolidation of shopping trips means parents make fewer impulse buys—and a lot of movie-related merch lives right in that US\$20-or-less impulse price-point.

But it also has to be said that much of the current climate was precipitated by the industry going back to the well too many times—*Iron Man 3*, *Toy Story 3*, *Smurfs 2*, *Cars 2*, *G.I. Joe 2*. It's a long list, and if you're seeing a pattern, you're not alone. Kids have picked up on it, too.

"A lot of these action movies are sequels," says Johnson. "So kids already have those toys and know the story. Kids are smarter than a lot of people give them credit for. I think at this point they are kind of like, 'Really? *Spider-Man 2* is actually *Spider-Man 5*. Hello?'"

On the licensing side, the industry is arguably adrift in a sea of sequels, with studios more concerned about guaranteeing some certainty at the box office than with what might follow at the cash register. But then there was *Frozen*.

After so many licensing programs over-promised and under-delivered, Disney did the opposite with what

Warner Bros.'s Godzilla has stomped the box office and is now looking for a repeat at retail



has since become the highest-grossing animated feature ever. In fact, the House of Mouse held back to such an extent that Frozen merch is still almost impossible to find on shelves. Shortly after the film's release, consumer demand in the US exploded in key categories like girls fashion, with breakout items like Anna and Elsa role-play costumes selling more than 250,000 dresses during the holiday season alone. The *Frozen Storybook* deluxe app hit top 10 in the Kids and Entertainment categories of Apple's App Store in more than 100 countries. The Disney Store even produced exclusive, limited-edition Anna and Elsa dolls that sold out online in 45 minutes, setting a DisneyStore.com record for highest orders per minute.

But the film did something more important—it reminded retailers that rules and history go out the window when an incredible property resonates with kids. The film's November 27, 2013 launch date wasn't welcome news to retailers, who prefer October debuts that build towards the holiday. But *Frozen* propelled sales into 2014 and blew Disney's bottom line into orbit.

Michael Connolly, DreamWorks Animation's global head of consumer products and a former retail exec, has spent 23 years in the business at Walmart, Disney, Nickelodeon and

studios' features and historical releases. He says that while a B or a B+ property program used to get pushed hard by studios for big licensing programs and retail exposure, the key now is quality over quantity.

"We have to be realistic in our approach," he says, "because the last thing we want to do is leave a bad taste in the retailer's mouth."

Part of that means landing partners that understand the DNA of the property and can produce exceptional products. After grading each property, DreamWorks looks for a lead partner, usually a toy partner, that fits the brand.

For DWA's upcoming *B.O.O. (Bureau of Otherworldly Operations)*, which hits June 2015, Connolly says it found the perfect partner in Hasbro, which did an outstanding job in the '80s with another paranormal property, *Ghostbusters*.

"I think *B.O.O.* will have one of the most fantastic ranges," he says. "And it doesn't have to be a 20-foot range. But I will say that the eight feet it will have will be some of the most fantastic merchandise you'll ever see."

Karen McTier, EVP of domestic licensing and worldwide marketing at Warner Bros. Consumer Products, agrees with that approach. "The key to a successful program is getting the right partners on-board and working closely with each of them to tap into the most compelling themes and elements from these films—themes and elements that translate to great products and, as a result, great sell-through."

For *The Hobbit*, WBCP partnered with Lego and others on playsets that bring the wildly imaginative settings of Middle Earth to life. "Ultimately," she observes, "we're developing product that will expand the life of a property beyond the theater."

"The saying in the retail business is 'Everything the day before Christmas is a 50% markdown.' [The post-Frozen lesson is] judge it on the movie, not the timeline."

—Michael Connolly, DreamWorks Animation

now DWA. He says *Frozen* reopened the eyes of retailers to considering new ideas at the year-end holiday season.

"They call that 'the quarter of liability' and they don't want to set up merchandise," he notes. "The saying in the retail business is 'Everything the day before Christmas is a 50% markdown.'"

The post-*Frozen* lesson? "Judge it on the movie, not the timeline," Connolly adds.

Mind you, that doesn't mean that all retailers have changed their approach. "For *How to Train Your Dragon 2* [launching June 13], we're everywhere six weeks early, other than one retailer, which will remain nameless," says Connolly. "That one retailer is setting three weeks out, and I think it's a huge miss because they are going to wonder, 'Hey, why am I 10% sold through in week one? I should be 20%.' And we'll say, 'Well, your competition was set three weeks earlier.' We try to get everyone on the same playing field. That's our goal. But there is always one that will set later than the rest, and it makes it tough."

Reality check Real success at retail begins at the studio level. Connolly says DreamWorks gives a letter grade to each of its releases, comparing them to both the other

Beyond the six-week window Longevity is now the key. Connolly says that when he started at DreamWorks it was essentially a promo company that tended to think about one landmark at a time, which contradicted the lessons he learned during his years in retail.

"We are pushing our teams to get that space year-round and let the feature space be exactly that—just a promotion feature," he says. "So we have switched our tactics. Less promotion, more side counter. Coming from retail, I will take a sock in a sock modular in a 365-day space any time over an end cap of socks for a month."

The caveat, Connolly says, is that those lines have to be frequently refreshed. Steadily selling products sometimes get taken for granted, right up to the moment they suddenly stop selling, he contends. So DreamWorks has a system by which every item is reviewed and refreshed each season. It also has teams dedicated to every major retailer and tier, from department stores and e-commerce to the increasingly important dollar store and halo specialty retailers such as Pottery Barn Kids.

"If you can come up with a great movie range that sells in the summertime and gets reordered in the wintertime, and you get placement the next year at 50% or 60%, then

Merch for *How to Train Your Dragon 2* will be at most US retailers in the traditional window of six weeks prior to a film's release



you have hit your stride," he sums up. "When we develop a range, the first question I ask is: 'How are we going to maintain 50% for year two and keep it as a franchise? What do we have to do from a content perspective to keep it alive?' Because the most important year of a property is not year one, it's year two."

On the horizon Although 2014 might be a quiet year on the kids feature front, compared to 2013, there are still a few likely candidates for breakout L&M successes, such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Godzilla*, *Transformers: Age of Extinction* and *How To Train Your Dragon 2*.

WBCP, which licenses *Godzilla*, *The Hobbit* and other notables in 2014, is looking to be ambitious with the reach of its products, including plenty of special pieces.

"We create merchandise programs with the breadth and scope that offers something for fans of all ages," says McTier. "WBCP has been able to offer younger fans the opportunity to share in the excitement generated by the studio's theatrical films by creating programs that offer product for the older fan and serious collector, as well as product for a new generation of fans. We're able to create lines of merchandise appropriate for younger audiences because the franchises have such a rich history—allowing us to create 'inspired by' products that are age-appropriate and give kids the opportunity to play out the film-adventure and be a part of the major event."


She recognizes that mass-market retailers are moving faster than ever. More and more are interested in special and exclusive offerings designed to help them gain a competitive edge and studios have responded. *Godzilla*'s program, for example, features ambitious offerings from master toy partner Bandai America—including

the Atomic Roar Action Figure with fearsome atomic-breathing action—and Jakks Pacific's Massive *Godzilla* figure, which stands 43 inches tall.

Transformers: Age of Extinction also looks to be a potential hit when it barrels into US theaters on June 27. The franchise enjoys a special place in the hearts of consumers and retailers, thanks to its strong presence on TV and its wide demographic appeal, both attributes that allow property owner Hasbro to be aggressive with its licensing offerings.

The licensing programs for the film will play heavily with the "Transformers: More Than Meets the Eye" slogan, using it both as graphic branding on products and as an overall philosophy, with product lines that will have unexpected features or benefits for consumers.

"We have developed three global programs with each of our regions executing them with different retailers around the world," says Simon Waters, SVP of global brand licensing & publishing at Hasbro. "So we're able to satisfy our customers, but at the same time, we're able to keep our brand on-message and create consistency, making sure our characters are all represented in the right way."

Waters adds that constantly ensuring that products stay on-brand is really the nuts-and-bolts of the licensing business. "And as the brand and its new content and stories evolve, we are constantly developing in-line with consumer expectations. We are very driven by consumer insights. When we discover a new insight about a girl or a boy or a family, we make sure we take the appropriate franchise and develop solutions for it. That's how [My Little Pony spin-off] *Equestria Girls* came about, for example." 

Character corral

There's only really one place to get a read on what's next in kids entertainment licensing. Keep an eye out at Licensing Show for these up-and-coming properties.

BY DAWN WILENSKY



Scholastic Media goes cosmic

Scholastic Media is having an otherworldly time creating a full licensing program around new interplanetary animated comedy *AstroBlast!* Inspired by Scholastic books of the same name, the series aimed at two- to six-year-olds will premiere on US preschool net Sprout on July 12. It features the friendly five-member crew of the Astroblast Space Station, as well as quirky visitors from other planets across the galaxy. Every episode offers rich, humorous stories to help impart simple, age-appropriate messages about friendship, self-awareness and nutrition, along with other themes that support a child's social, emotional and physical development. The New York-based company is working with Sprout to incorporate these themes into its 2015 mass-market consumer products plan driven by toys & games, apparel, social and console gaming, and bedding. In addition, the publishing category will continue to be an important one for the brand. "We are striving to encourage young children to develop healthful eating and exercise routines, and to help them develop a sense of self-awareness, confidence and strong identity rooted in family and culture," notes Leslye Schaefer, SVP of marketing and consumer products for Scholastic Media.



NBCU preps Minions, intros Boxtrolls

On the kids side, NBC Universal is lining up what it hopes is a new franchise with *The Boxtrolls*, bowing in theaters on September 26. The stop-motion animated film revolves around a community of quirky, mischievous creatures who have been raised by an orphaned human boy, named Eggs, beneath the streets of Cheesebridge. When villain Archibald Snatcher comes up with a plot to get rid of the Boxtrolls, Eggs decides to venture above ground, where he teams up with Winnifred. Together, they devise a daring plan to save Eggs' family. Licensees already on-board include Chronicle Books, Little Brown, Funko, Hybrid/JEM, Rubie's Costume Company and Toy Factory. Products will head to specialty stores in Au-

gust. Audiences will also enjoy the antics of *Minions* on July 10, 2015, starring those wee yellow babbling characters from *Despicable Me*. Thinkway Toys takes the lead as master toy licensee, joined by Hasbro and Hybrid/JEM. An expanded product rollout will begin in summer 2015. "The success story is undeniable—we have taken an original IP and its breakout stars, the Minions, and have created a juggernaut franchise," says Cindy Chang, SVP of the consumer products group, Universal Partnerships & Licensing. "With all-new entertainment slated (including *Despicable Me 3*, summer 2017), we think the property will dominate the global cultural zeitgeist—and the licensing world—for years to come."

Outfit7 moves from iPhones to TV screens

With more than 1.7 billion downloads since 2010, and 230 million active users on its apps globally each month, everyone seems to be chatting about *Talking Tom and Friends*. Now in its fourth year, the app-turned-entertainment-franchise is moving to TV with a new 52 x 11-minute TV series and more YouTube webisodes in the works for 2015. IP owner Outfit7's COO Alessandro Traverso says broadcasters have yet to be announced, but deals are being finalized country by country. Licensing agents, however, are currently being signed, with Bulldog Licensing on-board for the US and Canada, Brand is Real for Israel, Enjoy Brand Licensing for Spain, Portugal and Andorra, and Icon Promotion for Russia, Ukraine and CIS. A major initiative on the product side is Talking Shop, a global online website (talkingfriends.com) being created to showcase toys, stationery, apparel and accessories from the brand's 40-plus existing licensees.

Retail exclusives for Avengers sequel

In a franchise first, Marvel has developed a retail strategy that will showcase the many elements of highly anticipated sequel *Avengers: Age of Ultron* via distinct and separate retail experiences. Retailers such as Walmart, Target and Toys 'R' Us will each offer customized, designated retail destinations

filled with products from existing partners like Hasbro and Lego, and new ones including Under Armour (performance wear), Jakks Pacific (toys), KIDdesigns (electronics), Rubie's (costumes) and American Greetings (social expressions). Disney Consumer Products is also on the hunt for healthy foods, performance sporting goods, camping, fitness, luggage and active wear licensees. "Having new, innovative product and best-in-class retail statements is key to our overall strategy to leverage this blockbuster film, and we are looking to do everything bigger and better than 2012, including the first-of-its-kind execution of retail-exclusive themes, product and marketing," says Paul Gitter, SVP of licensing for Marvel at DCP.

Alvin!!! returns to TV

Janice Karman and producer Ross Bagdasarian have a new TV series lined up based on iconic IP Alvin and The Chipmunks, originally created by Bagdasarian's father, Ross Sr. Debuting in 2015, *ALVINNN!!!* and *The Chipmunks* has already been presold to Nickelodeon and will be broadcast on more than 70 of its channels worldwide, followed by a free-to-air rollout in late 2015 and beyond. Paris-based PGS Entertainment and Bagdasarian Productions are partnering on a global (excluding North America) L&M strategy. At the TV series' launch, target categories include home entertainment,

publishing, toys, apparel and apps for both the mass market and specialty tiers. Marketing and promo programs linked to music are also in the works, as the new TV series features an original Chipmunk/Chipette song in every episode. A new movie is also planned for 2016.

New Thunderbirds focuses on boys action

Thunderbirds takes flight once again as a new boys action-adventure series on the heels of the property's 50th anniversary. *Thunderbirds Are Go!* will premiere in 2015, featuring updated content and products designed for a new generation of five- to 11-year-olds. The series will also include subtle nods to the heritage of the original UK-centric show to cater to its secondary audience of nostalgic fans. Led by master toy partner Vivid Imaginations in the UK, the licensing program will pay homage to the property's rescue and adventure themes. Apparel, publishing, digital and back-to-school will also be the driving categories for the mass-market and specialty retail programs. Retail promotions, digital initiatives, new product partnerships, events and live shows are also being lined up by IP owner ITV Studios Global Entertainment to support the launch.



A winning formula for science series

The fun and exploration of science is the impetus behind new animated series *Thomas Edison's Secret Lab*. Partnering on the project are property owner Genius Brands International, based in L.A., and American Public Television. The half-hour series will debut in 2015 in the US and around the world. Licensees are currently being sought for toys, apps, games, science kits, electronics, apparel and publishing with a goal of retail penetration in all channels for spring 2015. "In addition to developing a retail program and entertainment content, the company is creating an in-school curriculum to expand the brand into classrooms, as well as building an online community and virtual lab," says Amy Moynihan Heyward, president of Genius Brands International.

Fremantle readies mammoth preschool series

Ella the Elephant is getting lots of traction in domestic and international markets with 23 broadcasters secured in over 50 territories. The preschool series recently launched in the UK on Tiny Pop, winning shares of up to 89% higher than the channel's time slot average among girls aged four to six. The show also nabbed the top spot on ABC2 in Australia in its timeslot among children zero to 15 and girls zero to 15. The property's key entertainment partners across the US include Warner Bros. with the first DVD due this fall. Shock in Australia and Cass Film in Poland have also signed on as additional home entertainment partners. While no master toy deals have been inked, an announcement is expected closer to the show for the property aiming to be a global franchise, says Rick Glankler, EVP & GM at FremantleMedia Kids & Family Entertainment. The series is produced by DHX Media, in association with TVO Kids and FremantleMedia Kids & Family Entertainment. DHX has international distribution rights in Canada, the US, Middle East and India, with FremantleMedia handling the rest of the world.



Crafting explored in girl-centric property


Instead of crafting just another girls property, Sammie Luck created iDoo-B-Doo, a "make & create" brand for three- to seven-year-olds. "Our immediate ambition is to create a unique brand that combines memorable stories and characters with creativity in a way that little girls will love," says Luck. Led by Dolly Doodles, her puppy Tinkaboo and others in the Doo-B-Doo Crew, the property encourages girls to make paper craft cards and gifts. Initial licensing is focusing on greeting cards, arts & crafts, publishing, stationery and apparel. The program will launch in the UK this summer. UK-based JELC is the global licensing agent, while Manchester, England-based Flix Facilities is charged with TV development. Television and publishing deals are already in the pipeline. iDoo-B-Doo is also seeking partners for website development, with an eye toward creating an online crafting club with "make & create" demos and branded products for sale.

Preschool fave moves into new retail space

After an exclusive home stand at Toys 'R' Us during holiday 2013, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, which airs on PBS Kids, is moving into new retail territory at Walmart, Kmart, Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million in the US. Summer marks the expansion of its publishing program under Simon & Schuster's Simon Spotlight imprint with four titles—another six are planned for fall. An expanded mix from master toy licensee Jakks Pacific, as well as costumes from Disguise and a Colorforms Deluxe Playset from University Games, will hit shelves later this year. Additionally, first-ever licensed goods are heading to Canadian retailers in the upcoming months under the watchful eye of property owner The Fred Rogers Company based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and co-producer and licensing agent Out of the Blue Enterprises.



Slugterra makes moves to the big screen

A "slug"fest is planned for boys action property Slugterra as it heads to the big screen for the first time. The 70-minute production titled *Return of the Elementals* will have a theatrical debut on roughly 300 screens in the US this August and a second TV movie is due this fall. With 50 licensees already in tow, Nerd Corps Entertainment's property recently broadened its retail reach at Kmart, as well as Target in both the US and Canada. New product categories include apparel, backpacks, bags, notebooks, pajamas, snacks, watches and water canteens. The Vancouver, Canada-based company has also secured several new apparel deals with Fashion UK, CI Maquila (Colombia) and Peru Moda (Peru). Latin America continues to see plenty of licensing activity, including deals recently signed with Anthaix S.A.C. for housewares and stationery in Peru, Pharmalliance for cosmetics in Mexico, and Inversiones Arca SA for party goods in Chile. Panini recently extended its trading card rights from Brazil to include France, Portugal and Spain, as well. "It has had a great reception on free TV worldwide—most recently with successful launches in Germany, Spain and Greece. We're going after more new products and new territories," says Ken Faier, Nerd Corps president. 



Deer Little Forest to leap from page to product

Deer Little Forest makes its debut at the show with a strategy of developing three main pillars—publishing, licensing and TV. Based on the illustrations of Jo Rose, the property is being developed as a preschool book and TV series featuring Forest Flo and her band of woodland friends. On the publishing front, the first of six books, *The Animal Moon Parade*, is ready to roll. Property owner Deer Little Forest is currently seeking publishing partners in the UK, US, Italy, France, Germany, Netherlands and Spain. Less than one year old, the UK licensing program, being handled by agent Lisa Hryniewicz of Koko Media, has attracted leading stationery retailer Paperchase in the UK, which has 16 designs available in its flagship stores across the territory, as well as at UK online retailer T-Shirt Booth, which is prepping customizable tees. Newly appointed US agent New York-based Think Tank Emporium will be seeking licensees in publishing, stationery, gifts, soft toys, arts & crafts and greeting cards. Once a publishing plan is in place, the company will seek production partners to create a TV series. Six scripts based on the book synopses are available; TV and animation trade shows are a target for 2015.



Meet our friend Frankentoon. Bizarre as it looks this is indeed the ultimate character. We've pulled from the excellence of some of the most successful characters and created the ultimate... er... character?

Equity

No matter your nationality, gender, age or political leaning you know who he is, where he's from and what he represents. Since 1928 he's been the biggest little character in the universe.

Humour

With a very smart, coffee addicted, talking dog and twin sisters that treat him as a lab rat the conceit is off to a good start. Add some wonderfully layered humour and we've got funny. Very funny.

Disidentification

We connect because we shouldn't. Despite being from long, long ago and far, far away we've followed his journey to redemption. We empathise with the twisted hero inside the suit - because it could happen to anyone in those circumstances.

Nurturing Identification

What's not to love? They love us, we love them. It's one big furry care-fest. Since 1981 Care-a-Lot has held a special place in hearts and minds around the world - there's no one bigger on the nurturing circuit.

Fantasy

Jake and Finn's Fantastical Adventures in Ooo have to be seen to be believed!

Emulatory Identification

Gender arguments aside (please, just for now) the Princess is the single most emulated character in the world... every little girl is daddy's / grandpa's princess at somepoint. And they love the adoration and success it brings.

Reflective Identification

Peppa Pig's imperious dominance of the pre-school market is quite simple. She lives the life of "every" family. Going to the park, making mistakes and playing with friends. If you hold a mirror up to them it's kind of what pre-school children do.

X - Platform

No one does it like LEGO. No one can. The most physically experiential toy on the planet translates beautifully across all media...by staying completely true to its values and positioning. Grown-up brand management of very little people. We love LEGO.

Oblique Familiarity

Although a goldfish and a cat aren't usually found in the same school (let alone as adoptive brothers) the experiences in this amazing world are not uncommon to the children. Gumball's experiences are both familiar and unhinged - and so accessible and funny.

Referenced brands and characters - Disney - Micky Mouse, Star Wars - Darth Vader, Johnny Test, Care Bears, Disney Princess, Adventure Time, Peppa Pig, Lego, The Amazing World of Gumball.

Kids Industries (kidsindustries.com, @kidsindustries) has been making family brands stronger through award winning Insight, Strategy and Content since 1999. Based in offices in London and Cape Town, KI is the only company of its type in the world. We work right around the world and are proud to work with eONE, DHX, Disney and Al Jazeera amongst many others.

Kids Industries
the family agency™



Are you hot enough?

Kidscreen's final print issue of 2014 will rank and profile the world's top 50 kids entertainment companies. If you want yours to be in the Hot50 mix, now is the time to put your hat in the ring.

We're accepting submissions until Friday, July 25—and it's totally FREE! All you have to do is fill out our easy online form at **hot50.kidscreen.com** and tell us about your company's three biggest achievements from the last 12 months in one of these business categories:

• **Production** • **Distribution** • **Broadcasting** • **Licensing** • **Digital Media**

You are welcome to submit in more than one category—you just have to fill out a different form for each one. And obviously, you'll want to focus on achievements that are relevant to each category you're submitting in.

In August, we'll invite all Kidscreen readers to review the submissions online and tell us which company they think is tops in each category. (We know what you're thinking, but don't worry! Our system only allows bona fide Kidscreen subscribers to vote, and only one time in each category.)

The Kidscreen Hot50 will be determined by tallying these votes, and we will announce the final rankings on October 22 in our Kidscreen Daily newsletter and with a press release to all relevant trade media.

Companies that make it into the Kidscreen Hot50 will be featured in a special print issue streeting on December 8. It will be mailed to Kidscreen's full circulation list, plus distributed at NATPE (1,200 copies) and Kidscreen Summit (1,500 copies).

We'll also showcase the Kidscreen Hot50 companies on a dedicated microsite for a full year, and then archive this content so it's still searchable and accessible online.

If you have any questions about the Kidscreen Hot50, please email Jocelyn Christie (jchristie@brunico.com).

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